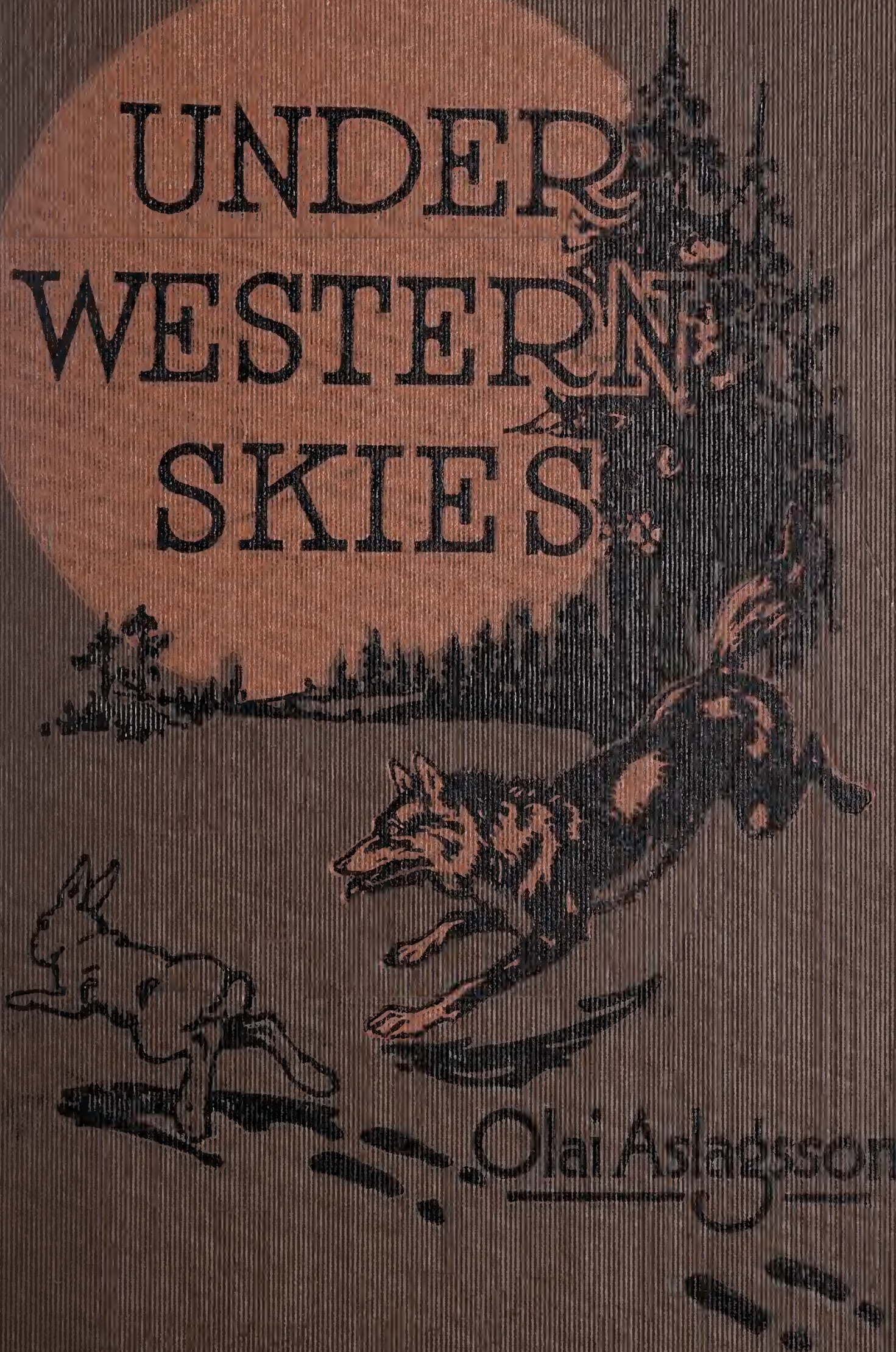
UNDER WESTERN SKIES



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THE COYOTE

UNDER WESTERN SKIES

by

OLAI ASLAGSSON

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THE COYOTE

CHAPTER ONE

HALF WOLF—HALF FOX

SOME call them wolves—prairie wolves—while others call them coyotes. For myself I prefer the latter name; it is the one by which I came to know them, and which I heard used by the people out west who did know them. The lonely prairies and the mountain fastnesses are now the only refuge of the coyote, since civilization is pushing forward from either shore.

The name coyote is Mexican—or Spanish; but in the homeland of the coyotes this name has been so long in common use that to call them prairie wolves would merely cause confusion.

Since my first acquaintance with the coyotes I have thought of them as hybrids, a cross between the wolf and the fox. I can think of no other description which would give those who have never seen the animal, nor had experience of its cunning, a better idea of what it is like.

In size the coyote is midway between the wolf and the fox. In color it is of a reddish yellow, with a suggestion of gray at certain seasons of the year. Its tail is more bushy than that of the wolf, and somewhat less bushy than that of the fox. The coyote has the narrow snout of the fox and the broad head of the wolf, with bright and beautiful

eyes. It is a graceful and interesting beast, with a cunning which is equal to that of the fox in the struggle for existence. Tho not dangerous to man, or to the larger animals—such as horses and cattle—it will sometimes, when occasion demands it, fight with the foolhardiness of the wolf in defence of life and liberty. Such was my first impression of the coyote, and this is the picture of it still remaining with me.

It is a day in spring; a day of sunshine and clear skies, with a hint of coming summer in the gentle breezes from the fields of snow up on the mountain sides. It is springtime on the strips of rolling prairie winding in among the mountain walls, and cut thru by river canons and countless ravines, which are dry except when occasionally filled by melting snows and heavy rains.

Scattered over the prairie are seen low bushes, somewhat like heather, but less soft, and of a light green or grayish color. Between these bushes the light, sandy soil is bare; and all is somber and gray—in striking contrast to the moors of Norway, for instance, with their thick heather and rich brown color. The soil here in the west has a much lighter hue; so light, in fact, as seriously to tax the eyes when it is bathed in bright sunshine. The grass comes late and in little tufts, and is cured into hay by the July sun when the rains have ceased.

The flowers are few; generally only those of the cactus are in evidence. And of birds there are only a few varieties of the grouse, and an occasional bird of prey sailing alone across the face of heaven and

keeping a watchful eye for a possible victim—lonely as the prairies and the mountains among which they live. There are no little songbirds to break the somber monotony.

The sagebrush—which might as well be called heather—sometimes hides a little rabbit, who takes an occasional little nibble at the bunch-grass or heather, its sensitive nose alive to every slightest change of the wind. This acute sense is the good guardian angel of many wild things.

A few trees only are to be seen bordering the river banks.

On this day of spring a coyote is seen trotting over the prairie, sniffing the air, and carefully examining whatever it may chance to see.

It is alone, and it goes leisurely; with frequent stops, indicating the wild animal's avoidance of danger and its sharp craving for something to eat. It moves in about the same way as a dog would have done; but its frequent stops, the manner in which it sniffs at the slightest breath of air, the careful casting of the eyes to either side, these indicate either appetite or a troubled conscience.

It may be doubted that the coyote has ever felt the sting of a bad conscience—at least I have never heard of a case in point. But I have many times witnessed its ravenous appetite; how it revels in a carnival of gluttony whenever occasion offers.

The day is nearly done. The sun hangs low on the western horizon, and the coyote has eaten nothing since early morn.

Suddenly it stops and stands motionless as a

statue. It must have seen something stir under one of the bushes over there.

In the wild places, where the wild animals have the same color as their surroundings, some of them changing color with the seasons; it is only by moving that they betray their whereabouts.

The coyote seems to know this and remains standing still, looking over to the spot where something had stirred, waiting. For it knows also that if there is some living thing under the heather over there, a rabbit or a grouse, this living thing will soon move again. And the coyote likewise understands that its own movements also may be observed, and that the slightest stir will cause the thing under the bushes to stand still also and trust to watchful waiting. Thus the coyote remains standing, still as death, with only a gentle quivering of the nostrils. The beast of prey is about to change its tactics, when something stirs again in the same place.

And then the coyote sees what it is; sees the long ears of a rabbit, thin and transparent in the slanting sunlight.

Now is the time when care is necessary. The coyote remains standing perfectly still for yet some moments; until the rabbit stirs for the third time, turned away from its enemy, stretching its hind legs and reaching out after a bunch of grass.

And in the earnest desire for enough to eat before the sun goes down the coyote to some extent forgets its natural caution. The slight sound made by the wind stirring the heather enables the beast

of prey to move around to one side in order to have the rabbit to the windward.

Then the wily robber of the prairies begins to use its cunning to come nearer to its quarry. At first it walks erect, taking a stop now and then, each time the rabbit reaches out to nibble the heather.

And how the mouth of the coyote does water, and its throat burn. How its bloodthirsty eyes do shine red and green in the light of the setting sun.

Presently it cowers closer to the ground and crawls nearer, till the quarry is only ten or twelve feet away. Now one strong leap will do it. Not a muscle moves in the lean body; no sound breaks the silence; nothing gives the rabbit warning of the imminent danger.

The cringing and waiting coyote looks like a yellowish piece of rock or like a little hillock covered with dead grass. The coyote is very cunning; it might long ago have risked the leap.

What is it waiting for, anyhow? Don't worry; it knows what it is doing. Like the experienced hunter, it waits for the right moment. There is no sportsman's fever, no nervousness. Indeed, to the coyote this is no sport; it is the struggle for existence. While these two are lying there—the weak and the strong—the sun sinks blood-red behind the western hills, its last beams mirrored in the gluttonous eyes of the beast of prey.

The silence then becomes still more dense. It is as if something has sickened and died. There is a gentle breath of wind over the prairie, carefully

stirring the bunches of heather and the dry grass of last year. The sun is down, and the day draws its last breath.

However, this gentle breath carries the scent of the coyote in the direction of the rabbit. There is a sudden change of position. The timid heart of the rabbit is paralyzed with fear. Is there yet time to escape, or is it too late?

The long and muscular hinder limbs of the rabbit act instinctively and mechanically. Quick as lightning there is a flash and a turn, and a little cloud of dust is kicked into the air; and a coyote with open jaws and cruel fangs drops down on the place —where the rabbit is not.

The coyote turns and looks after the rabbit, now merely a gray streak moving over the prairie. The coyote knows well enough that the rabbit will stop, sit down on its haunches and look back at the enemy. But the coyote also knows that the rabbit can not well be caught after being frightened and put to a test of speed.

So the coyote licks its chops once or twice, casts a last hungry look after the disappearing streak of gray, and sneaks away.

The light fades, and a chill comes into the air. As soon as darkness begins to settle down over the lonely wastes, the coyote begins to sing its peculiar evening song; a song which better than anything else fits the utter solitude of these wide plains. In the song there is an undertone of sadness unspeakable. But should it cease it would be sorely missed by all who dwell on the prairies and love them with

all emotions which they inspire. On rare occasions the coyote may bark or howl in the daytime; to desist from doing so at the coming of night would be as impossible as to stop the stars in their courses.

The coyote is not gregarious like the wolf. Often it is alone. Often there are two, and sometimes as many as three or four together, but I have heard of none who has seen more than six in company. When the coyote barks a person not familiar with it will surely think that there must be three or four of the beasts; there are so many distinct tones. It always begins with some sharp and short barks, which then change into a piercing, long drawn howl. The tones overlap, the new beginning before the first is finished.

Two or three coyotes often join forces and voices, sitting on a mound or hillock and howling their song while day changes into night. It then sounds like a whole orchestra of infernal discord.

CHAPTER TWO

A DYING MOTHER

THE coyote is the most troublesome enemy of the cattlemen and ranchers. It is hated for its cunning; but all who are interested in wild animals must admire its wisdom. It has learnt many tricks in the endless fight with man.

The coyote has in the course of the years cost the sheep ranchers enormous sums; so it is not to be wondered at that these get together and agree to offer a prize for the head of any coyote brought in, large or small, in addition to the bounty paid by the state.

There are many who hunt the coyote in the winter season; for then they have little else to do. Most of the men are miners, patiently washing gold from the sandy banks of the rivers. The ice of winter stops their work. So they go out to hunt the coyote—a business that fits well into their free and easy mode of life.

Then there are professional hunters with dogs and horses. The sheep herders also take part in the hunt, as do all others whose homes are on the prairies.

That the coyote has been able to survive all this persecution will not surprise one acquainted with its

cunning; but it is a miracle that the beasts are, seemingly at any rate, as numerous as ever.

Its habitat is, however, not by far as large as it was. Pioneer settlers are encroaching on the coyote's kingdom. It is driven farther into the fastnesses and desert year by year, as are all the other wild animals. Fortunately for the coyote, there are, besides the mountains, great tracts which never will be fit for cultivation, and which always will remain in possession of the wild beasts; a kingdom whose extent has been limited, but which is theirs for all time.

Civilization and the wild things do not go well together. Even as the Indian has been compelled to give way before the white man of industry, so the animals also have been pushed back. Some species have been exterminated. Others have migrated northward to more peaceful haunts. But in spite of all, the coyote holds its own, seemingly with no diminution in numbers. It gives way in certain places; but fortunately there still are places in which it may live as before, where it may love and hate, and where it may sing its song when the blood-red sun has gone down behind the western mountains.

*

Out there they call him German Fritz; for, many years ago he came over from Germany. By profession he is a miner. For many years he has been patiently hoping that some company would build a railroad up to the copper districts in the mountains where he has his claim.

His copper mine is well enough, but the way to it is long and impassable. It will not pay to pack the copper out on mules; and the mining companies have time to wait until they can secure the mines for nothing. Optimistic as all miners must be in order to keep up their courage thru lifelong disappointments, German Fritz has waited year after year, hoping that the railroad might be built.

He is a tall, lean man, old and gray; careless about his dress; and contrary to the general rule among men of his class, he has money in the bank. He now seldom does any work in his mine; but having lived so long out on the wild frontier, he can not remain quietly at home. So the spirit often moves him to take his rifle and roam the prairies. On occasion he also goes up into the mountains.

On one of his summer excursions he sees a coyote with a prairie hen between its jaws. This is evidence that the coyote has its young cubs somewhere not far away. The coyote does not see Fritz, for he has been sitting for some time behind a little mound. He is so near to the coyote that had he wished it, he could easily have shot it dead. In fact he puts the rifle to his shoulder, but soon lowers it again. Will he not shoot? Perhaps his dear old heart will not permit him to destroy this life wantonly; or perhaps he is thinking of the innocent young cubs, who would then lose their mother and only support.

No, it is not this that stays his hand. Old Fritz is an honorable man, to be sure, with no cruelty in

EVENING SONG

his nature, but he is not bothered with maudlin sentimentality.

These many years during which he has explored the mountain clefts, caught his fish, hunted and shot wild beasts, cooked his food and baked his bread, have robbed him of all sentimental nonsense. No, Fritz's trained eyes tell him at once that the coyote is a mother; and he has a pleasant vision of himself collecting the bounty, not on one head, but on many. Thus it means to him more trophies of the chase and many money prizes instead of merely one. So now it is a question of discovering the whereabouts of the cubs; he can come tomorrow and dig them out.

The mother coyote always has a warm hole in the ground for her young; tho she never, or very seldom, digs the hole herself.

The coyote is not enthusiastically fond of hard work. It always prefers, if possible, to satisfy its wants without any such effort. It is only when the mother coyote has her young that she has a home down in some hole. Generally she has merely taken possession after driving out some weaker animal. In all other seasons, whether hot or cold, wet or dry, the coyote roams the plains. When the sun in the cold winter stands highest the coyote may steal an hour's nap in some hollow, on some slope facing south, one from which a good look-out can be kept.

Fritz does not this day find the coyote's hole in the ground. He tries to follow the mother animal with his eyes; but the land is too uneven, and the color of the coyote soon makes it impossible to

separate it from the tufts of heather. Fritz begins to be sorry that he did not shoot when the chance offered. The hole may be miles from here. Then he smiles as the thought occurs to him that a dog will be able to follow the fresh trail.

Next day he mounts his nag and rides to the place, armed with pick and spade, and followed by a shaggy dog. The dog knows its business, and seems to be energetic enough to accomplish results.

Fritz takes the dog to the spot where he had met the coyote. The dog would like to chase the rabbits; but it is well trained, so that a mere threatening look causes it to obey orders.

The dog is put on the scent of the coyote, follows it for some distance, stops short, runs about in a circle, follows it again, comes back, and then decides that the trail is an old one.

Fritz, however, knows in which direction the coyote went; so he follows it, hoping to pick up a more fresh trail.

And luck is with him, badly handicapped as he is in matching his poor wit against that of the coyote. He picks up a fresh scent which the dog can follow; and they soon stumble upon the mother coyote herself, busy with her dinner at the bottom of a dry river bed.

They see each other at the same time.

The coyote, confused perhaps by the unexpected sight, bounds up out of the river bed, instead of keeping in it—as they usually do—and starts to run across a broad, level plain, on which a fast horse may keep up with her.

Then the chase begins. Horse and hound tear across the plain; the dog barking loudly, and the horse putting its whole mind to the matter of avoiding the spurs, which Fritz does not hesitate to dig into its sides.

In the beginning the horse seems to gain on the fleeing coyote. But the ground becomes more broken, putting the horse at a disadvantage; and then the distance between the hunter and the hunted becomes greater and greater.

Even then the dog is left far behind. The ground becomes still more broken. The horse is steadily losing; and Fritz, seeing that he can not get nearer to the coyote, lifts his rifle and shoots.

The ball, fired from the back of a galloping horse, fails of its mark; and the coyote, who has been shot at before and knows what it means, zigzags her way till she is out of sight behind the nearest hill.

Still the dog follows the scent across the broken ground, tho for a half hour nothing comes of it. The dog has no difficulty in keeping to the tracks of its quarry; and if the coyote runs to the hollow where she has her young, there will be no difficulty in finding them.

But the coyote is a perfect fiend for cunning, and none knows this better than does Fritz. He is fully prepared to have the mother coyote now try to lead him away from her dearest possession.

Suddenly she reappears on the top of a ridge stretching westward parallel with the cattle path which Fritz is following.

She trots as unconcernedly as if ignorant of the

existence of horse, dog, and man. She merely trots along for a matter of forty rods or so, keeping just so far ahead of the horse; and she does not as much as look behind. She makes a fine target against the clear, blue sky.

There is a steep climb from the prairie to the top of the ridge; and Fritz understands that his horse can not make it. But how had the coyote managed to put the dog off the scent? The dog is running with its nose to the ground, without looking up, and utterly unconscious of the fact that the coyote is up on the ridge near by—so near that she can take note of all its movements.

Fritz now at once sees the hopelessness of continuing this chase. He jerks his horse up, takes careful aim and shoots. The sharp report breaks the silence of the prairie. In the same moment the coyote makes a great jump, and then falls and lies still as tho dead.

When they reach the place she is not there, but a pool of blood tells the story; no doubt she has been mortally wounded.

It now is an easy matter to follow her path, marked out as it is by the heart's blood of a dying mother. And Fritz knows that in these circumstances she will instinctively try to reach her cubs, and will thus reveal their hiding place. In her final agony she will forget her cunning; which she has so often shown in leading the enemy away from her young.

At last Fritz finds her outside of her burrow

with her cubs about her. She is lying stretched out on the ground, and is dead.

Fritz stops short and looks at the young cubs, touched by their helplessness, by the manner in which they are trying to wake up their sleeping mother. There are five of them. They pull at her, make piping sounds with their thin voices, sniff at her, lick her face lovingly, sit with their heads turned half away as if in deep thought. They wonder why mother does not stir, why she bleeds, and why she had brought them no food.

Then they are afraid of the horse, now nibbling at the grass; and they seek safety down in the burrow.

Pick and spade now come into use; and after an hour's work Fritz has reached the bottom of the hole, where the young coyotes are huddled together helpless with fear.

The old miner sees how they try to shut out the danger by closing their eyes to it. He thinks of how they tried to wake up the mother he had killed, and his heart is filled with pity. He can not kill them as he had intended. He will take them home with him. Sold alive they may bring him more money.

CHAPTER THREE

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH

TWO of the young coyotes are given a home in the back yard of a hotel in the town. They are a he and a she, one big and one little. And the he is the little one, and also the one that seems to be best satisfied.

It is said that it takes five generations to produce a tame coyote. One may understand, then, how these two prisoners resent being cooped up in that back yard. Every movement, their foolish efforts to get loose, are stopped by means of cruel chains. In the beginning it is awfully trying. People come to look at them, and jerk them up sharp when they sneak away as far as the chains will allow. There is nothing which these two coyotes hate like the presence and the curiosity of human beings.

During the first few days they can not be induced to eat. They whine piteously all the time; and all night long may be heard the rattling of their chains. This continues for some days; forward and back, as far as the chains permit.

Once in a while they stop to swallow a mouthful of water, when the heat is trying. But they stand still only a moment; while the fine, brown eyes look to either side, sad and timid. Sometimes they start

up nervously without cause, and then continue to trot back and forth.

The little male cub is the first to eat of the food set before them by the cook of the hotel. He is so famished that the food tastes good, tho he never before has tasted just that kind of meat. But the female, who is larger and more fierce, tries to fly at the cook, with wild hatred flashing from her usually innocent looking eyes. Had the chain allowed it, she would have buried her fangs in him. But then she sneaks away and is ashamed.

After a time the young coyotes become more reconciled to man and to their life in the hotel yard. The male cub sometimes even shows that he longs for the coming of the cook; and he shows the coyote's sober joy at the appearance of food. She, on the other hand, remains callous to every offer of friendship. She begs to be excused from any nearer acquaintance, and nurses her natural hatred toward her captors.

This inability to accommodate herself to existing circumstances finally causes her death.

On a certain bright day the cook, as usual, brings them their dinner; when the fierce female buries her small fangs in his hand.

The cook kicks her little body against the wall of the woodshed, where it falls down with a loud rattling of the chain; but without any whining, tho one hind leg was broken. Before night she was shot and put out of her misery.

It was on this very day that I first made the acquaintance of the surviving cub. The short story of

his life was told me by Fritz himself over a glass of beer in the barroom of the hotel.

The cub was too young to understand what had happened to his sister; and he let even a stranger like myself gently stroke his fur.

He is dear and innocent in his playfulness, cavorting like a young puppy on his clumsy legs. It is a fine, narrow head, which he holds gracefully aslant, and which, with the clear brown eyes, are among his racial distinctions.

I stopped but a few days in the town, until I found work; but during those days I was a diligent visitor of the coyote. My work will take me away; and it will be months before I see the young cub again.

When I came back to the town the winter season was on us. Storms swept over the prairies, and at times there was a heavy fall of snow.

The young coyote, now obeying the name King, is almost full grown; and it has achieved the dignified bearing which it lacked when a young cub. Its whole nature seems to have undergone a radical change. It no longer cringes and whines. It goes about with a proud bearing and fearless eyes, all the time pulling hard at the hated chain—which it had come to hate more and more fiercely and had polished and dented with its teeth during the long nights, when raging with anger it had heard the howling of its brethren roaming free over the prairies.

During the daytime the chained coyote was more quiet. It lay outside of its kennel even in the cold-

est weather, looking out over the prairie—this free prairie which is calling to it, but of which man has robbed it.

To look at King now none could think that he was the same coyote who had cringed and whimpered there as a cub, wagging his tail like a puppy and satisfied with his surroundings.

He has changed surprisingly; is grown large, larger than most coyotes, and has acquired all that fierceness which he had not had a chance to learn of his mother.

A couple of dogs had seemed to King to be unduly familiar, and they had paid the forfeit of their rashness with their lives. And of course King on occasion helped himself to the toothsome chickens and ducks that came too near.

"He will be a devil when he is a few months older," says the admiring Fritz.

As the winter advances King chafes more and more at being a prisoner. When the snow is deepest and the weather coldest, and the coyotes are the more fearless in approaching the little prairie town, half buried under its snowy blanket, then King's answering call to his brethren—his mighty vow-vow-vow-vow-o-o-o-u-u-u—was a thing to drive the people to drink.

There is talk of putting him out of the way; but nothing is done in the matter, until King one day injures a little girl, who had ventured too near.

This is too much, and the owner is ordered to do away with the nuisance.

Now it happens that in this same town there is a

bulldog, which because of evidence of an uncontrollable temper also has been condemned either to death or to life imprisonment in chains.

Now, a bulldog and a coyote together in some pen from which they can not escape should be able to furnish interesting entertainment. Both of these are to die anyhow; so why not have some fun out of it? The matter is discussed, and the day agreed on for this sporting event.

The day arrived. I stood at the hotel window, looking at the coyote, now to fight to the finish. My heart is with him, and has been with him from the first day of my making his acquaintance.

It is a dark winter day with snow-laden air, tho no snow is falling; a day much like one some years ago, on which I saw a man hanged. Such a day is not easily forgotten; and as I stand there looking thru the gray air at the doomed coyote, I feel the same old sinking of the heart within me.

In a few hours, perhaps, that fine fur will be covered with smears of blood; the light will have gone out of the clear eyes; the lithe body will be a lifeless clod, and soon become a rotting carcass. The thought oppresses me. Had it been in my power to do it I would not have hesitated to set the coyote free. It did not seem right to me to pit this young and untried beast against the bulldog, an experienced old fighter.

For the coyote has all his life been fastened to the chain. He has never been given a chance to strengthen his lungs by a run over the hills; and

good lungs is what he will especially need in the fight before him.

And now the time is come. The battle ground is the smallest of the many pens in which the cattle are sorted before being sent east each fall to the cities.

The time set is the afternoon. The bulldog is the first to put in an appearance. It is not a very large beast; but its fierce eyes and its nasty mouth with the cruel nether lip and its two great fangs—the whole expression and build show what the bulldog may be expected to do in a fight to the death.

Then King is brought and let loose into the pen. The dog greets him with a deep, hoarse growl; while the coyote remains standing erect and proud before the door, which is closed behind him. He looks his enemy in the eye without flinching. The ring of spectators maintain absolute silence. My heart is fairly pounding against my ribs.

The dog comes nearer, growling and with the lips turned back to expose the nasty fangs.

Now the coyote also moves. He walks on stiff legs close to the wall, shows his teeth and snarls.

These two beasts use quite different fighting tactics. A bulldog crawls rather than walks; and when it has laid hold on the enemy it simply holds fast without any thought of anything else. A coyote goes to it in a more active way. It snaps like the wolf, inflicts wounds, moves warily, and defends itself with its teeth.

The men begin to make bets. Most of them favor the dog. I can not and will not bet; I am

too much occupied with looking on and wishing of all my soul that something may happen to keep my favorite free of the bulldog's iron jaw. The dog is in the mean time infuriated more and more by the cries of the spectators. Its eyes shine with a greenish light, and its low growl is like distant thunder. The coyote must be frightened by all these people and their shouting, but he does not show it. He moves proudly as one sure of himself, on legs like steel springs, always with the two bright eyes fixed on the enemy. The fighters now come nearer together. The dog manoeuvers the coyote into a corner and comes at him with a crawling but quick motion.

My prayers go up: Ye powers above, keep the coyote free of those fangs. In the same instant the coyote growls sharply and shoots like a yellow streak over the dog, leaving a bloody gash along its white back.

The dog becomes still more furiously angry. It twists and turns with unexpected speed, and goes to the attack furiously and blindly. But this second onslaught like the first proved but a costly failure. There is a growl, a hissing sound, a sharp coming together of the dog's teeth, a leaping yellow body shooting over the back of the dog, leaving another deep scratch. This is repeated several times. The spectators cry out in sympathy for one or the other of the two fighters. The battle is marked by much growling and noise. The dog has smeared the boards with its blood and is now frothing at the mouth.

My heart is fairly dancing with admiration of my favorite; when suddenly comes the fearsome thought: How long will the coyote be able to stand the strain?

It is a fight to the finish. Will King manage to keep clear of those horrible fangs till the dog has been weakened thru loss of blood?

I don't know. I can only sit and hope for the best, while the gruesome fight goes on. In its fury the dog becomes quicker to attack. The coyote leaps, growls, and bites, and continues to keep clear of the cruel fangs.

Then something happens.

The pen is built of narrow timbers, solid at the corners only; so that there is an open space equal to their thickness between each pair of scantlings —something like three or four inches.

The walls were about eight feet high. We interested spectators had built a sort of platform half way up by planting some planks with their ends stuck into one of the openings between the timbers. Thus our weight rested on the timber on which the planks lie; and as the pen is old, many of the timbers are not so sound as they have been.

The two fighters are at each other in the middle of the enclosure. For the first time the coyote has not been able to keep clear of the enemy. Never having exercised beyond the length of a chain, the coyote could no longer stand up against the furious attack of the trained dog.

The dog is on top, trying again and again without success to fasten its fangs in the squirming

coyote. Its mighty bulldog jaws open and shut, and I am suffering torture.

For some seconds the cruel fangs strike only the sharp teeth of the coyote, or a barbed leather collar which fortunately still encircles his neck.

The coyote struggles desperately to get up on his feet; but his bleeding enemy is too heavy and too well trained.

Then it is that the thing happens.

Just as the situation seemed most hopeless, fate comes to the assistance of the coyote. One of the timbers of the pen gives way, the platform of planks falls down, and the spectators curse and shout.

The noise is such that even the furious dog ceases its efforts for a moment; and this moment is long enough to let the coyote spring to his feet and leap thru the opening made by the broken timber, over the heads of us, who have not as yet had time to scramble to our feet after the fall.

The dog acts as tho it would follow in chase, but at once sees the hopelessness of it and gives it up.

For the first time in his life King has the chance, and he puts his heart into his heels and fairly flies over the prairie. He is now free of all that smells of man, excepting for a strong leathern collar with sharp iron barbs.

He shows no hesitation in steering his course. He makes straight for the hill country to the south, from which he had so often while in chains heard the nightly call of his fellows, and toward which his eyes had been directed all the day with the longing of the wild animal for liberty.

Now we all stand there looking after the fleeing coyote. Others may have felt differently; I for my part felt gloriously happy and grateful.

The air still is gray and heavy with snow. The naked slopes are a depressing sight; and so is also the sight of the running coyote, now about to have his first experience of real life.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIBERTY, EATING, AND MATING

A NEW life now begins for the coyote. He keeps going all the first day, tho his limbs are sore from the fight with the dog. He is famished, but has no experience in providing himself with food. And as if even nature were determined to make his first taste of liberty bitter to him, it begins to snow.

Again and again he stops, sometimes because he is dead tired, sometimes to get the direction of the wind, and sometimes merely as having no definite destination. Occasionally, when he hears the howl of another coyote from far away, he stops long enough to give an answering call. Then he again trots on and on, farther from that which he dreads most of all: Man.

Toward morning the air clears. The stars twinkle in the dark heavens, and the wind dies. But the coyote continues his slow trot, now almost automatically, up hill and down, seemingly world without end.

Once he tries to catch a rabbit, but makes a failure of it. Then right on the top of a sharp ridge he stumbles on a flock of sheep, lying close around the covered wagon in which the herder has his home. The mouth of the coyote waters; never in his life has he seen so much food at one time.

He runs half way round them, to the place where the brush is most dense, and where he faces what little breeze there is.

How good it smells, and how tempting it is. But with the gentle wind there comes to him another scent, one which he knows and dreads: the scent of man and dog.

He licks his chops once or twice, and then goes his way as noiselessly as he came.

The gray dawn appears in the east, the light of the stars goes out, and the mountain tops with their caps of snow are faintly marked against the skies.

A coyote begins its morning song somewhere toward the dawn. There is an answer from far away and another near by. Then from every side is heard the traditional song, the weird song of the wild and lonely plains—the mysterious musical bond between the coyote and the prairies.

Where would the coyote be without these miles of rolling ground? And what would the prairies and the mountains be without the song of the coyote, which gives them this peculiar wild charm, this irresistible charm of solitude?

Now and again the runaway stops and listens; sometimes he gives an answering howl. But this does not have the wild abandon heard in the song with which the coyotes greet the coming day, nor the mockery in their call from the hills down to the sheep-herders below them.

Usually the song of the coyotes ceases when the sun rises; tho sometimes it may be heard off and on all day, especially when the skies are murky.

Our young runaway friend is now both tired and hungry. Faint as he feels, the warmth of the sun is comforting. He wants a place to rest and sleep. But his hunger tortures him. While chained in that back yard he was fed three times a day; and now it is a woefully long time since the last meal.

His keen sense of smell still tells him where those sheep are; and before he has time to think better of it, he is on his way toward them. He proceeds with caution, with the wild animal's sharp sense of direction, always against the wind. The scent grows stronger. And as he comes all the time nearer the source of it his heart is in a tremble; for his nose tells him that there is a man not far away.

He goes cautiously forward, till he is hidden in the heather on a ridge, from which he can see all those sheep grazing in the valley.

He sees also the man and the dog. Then King begins his first chase for the means of existence. His education in this matter has been neglected, but unerring instinct tells him just what to do. And he obeys it, till he finds himself but thirty or forty feet away from the sheep he has picked out for his meal; and without having as yet been seen.

He prepares for the spring, but hesitates, as not knowing exactly what will come of it. He has a sort of stage-fright. The sheep-herder is in plain sight, but far away, and the dog also can be seen.

The particular sheep which the coyote has chosen for his own comes toward him with no thought of danger, its head all the time down under the bushes hunting for the sparse fodder.

King stands tense and waiting. Without his knowing it, of course, his inherited instinct tells him that, being in color like his surroundings, he will not be seen while he does not move.

Now the sheep is close by and puts its head down into the heather. Then suddenly King takes heart and springs onto the back of the sheep, which with a frightened bawl starts running for its life with the coyote on its back.

A sheep always follows its leader if it has one, unless driven into such a panic of fright that it runs away from its fellows. All the sheep are standing with their heads under the bushes; but as soon as the nearest one hears one of the number running away it also starts off without taking the trouble to ask the reason for it. The next ones at once follow suit, and then the next on either side, until half of the whole flock are headed wildly for some common goal.

The herder soon sees what is doing; he sees the coyote, that will not let go his hold on the fleeing mutton. This interests the coyote so keenly that everything else is forgotten.

But then he hears the bark of the dog, and then a sharp report; and in the same instant something whizzes by his nose, so that he loses his hold and falls off the sheep's back so hard that it takes his breath away. Then there is another report, and still another; and each time something whizzes by too close for comfort.

The coyote is up with a bound, and intuitively

adopts the old trick of his kind, following a sharp zigzag course in running away from the rifle.

King had heard gunshots before this, but then he was chained. This is the first time that the meaning of these sharp reports dawns on him. And he never forgets it. All the forenoon he roams the plain without finding anything to eat. Several times he sees large flocks of sheep, but his experience of the morning causes him to fight shy of them.

In the middle of the day he steals a short nap. And not long after that he catches a rabbit down in the bushes by a dry river bed. This food gives him new courage and again fills him with the joy of life. When the sun sinks low that evening, and the shadows grow long over the prairie, and his fellows of the coyote breed again sing their discordant notes, he answers them with all the strength of his lungs.

During the second night King is more lucky than he was the first night. Under protection of the darkness, but still with the greatest caution—for he does not yet know that the darkness is a greater handicap to man than to the coyote—he crawls close to some sleeping sheep, and kills one of them before it has time to get up.

To begin with he is not especially courageous. The nearest sheep start to run; and the sound of their feet against the frozen ground makes him beat a retreat. The herder also has caught the sound and knows what it means. The night is pitch black, so that the herder can see nothing; but tho he does

not expect results, he takes his rifle on a venture and fires a shot at random into the darkness.

The coyote is frightened and runs, shaping a zigzag course as before; but when the report which had startled him so is not repeated, he soon stops, more from surprise than from any strong feeling of courage. And when another coyote not far away howls in mockery, King takes heart and answers, and then crawls nearer to the dead sheep.

Soon all is still again. He eats his fill and goes his way. But after that night he was never again afraid of a gunshot into the darkness.

In the morning the herder poisons what is left of the carcass.

The following night King comes back, to be sure; but he is warned by the suspicious smell of the poison and does not touch the carrion. His nose also warns him that there is a man near by; and his dread of everything smelling of man is so great that in spite of his hunger he trots off to look for food in some other place. So he preserves his life this day also; and as the time goes by he learns better and better to obtain food. There is an abundance of prairie chickens and rabbits and rodents; and especially of sheep. And so the winter goes, and the spring finds him still alive.

By the time that the snow melted early in the spring our coyote had grown to be larger than most of his kind. He has kept by himself, cautiously avoiding all living things, even those of his own kind. But in the springtime the soul of nature is

awakened; and he feels for the first time a certain want, a longing for companionship.

One evening when the sun goes down, and he hears the familiar call of another coyote, he gives a full-throated answer and walks toward the place from which the call has come.

Once in a while he stands still and barks. The answer comes, and he goes on, until he suddenly stops short at the foot of a ridge. Up on the top of it another coyote is silhouetted against the evening sky. Carefully he draws near, keeping always down the wind.

When about ten feet apart they stop, both of them stiff-legged, with heads held tense, only the nostrils moving. Thus they remain some time; until the other coyote moves half around to catch the scent. Then both wag their tails, come nearer and still nearer, sniff at each other, and are friends. However, there is one thing which the strange coyote looks at and smells of with some suspicion: the leather collar which the other has around his neck.

The two friends now roam the prairie together for some days.

King had been longing for companionship and had now found it. But strangely enough, the longing is not satisfied;— not so strange after all. For this is springtime, the season of mating, and these two coyotes are both of the same sex.

They keep together nevertheless. In the evenings they sit on a knoll and sing in unison their lovelorn duets.

One evening after sundown, when the echo of

their song had ceased, another and smaller coyote is seen to approach them. It stops at some little distance and sniffs the still air. They do the same, standing erect and tense. Then the new coyote comes close to them. After the introduction, King and his comrade seem to grow a little cool toward each other, and keep themselves one on either side of the newcomer. For it is a female, and spring-time is in their blood.

She it is for whom King has been longing for a time; and for this he has been sending his call out into the night as never before.

But the coolness between King and his comrade now soon becomes active enmity.

They look askance at each other with hate in their eyes whenever one of them comes too near her; they snarl and show their teeth. Then one day they fight. Both are big and strong, and for a long time they seem to be very evenly matched. But King has his youth to pit against the other's greater experience, and comes out of it as the victor; and goes his way, bloody and satisfied, in company with the female who from now on is his mate.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MODERN ESAU

SPRING is here; the sun already rides high in the heavens, and a gentle breeze blows out of the West.

It is in April or May that the lambs come. The care of sheep happened to be my business at the time, and I had been hired by a rancher for the lambing season. The sheep were kept at a place only a few miles from the town from which King had run away.

It is one of the first days in May. The lambs have not put in an appearance, but all of us are busy with the preparations. I have in the morning been down to the river and cut armfuls of willow saplings, to which we fasten flags of red cloth. These are to be planted in the earth around the ewes with the newborn lambs to keep the coyotes away in the night. Another precaution is the burning of some gunpowder. All experienced coyotes are acquainted with it and try to keep at a distance from it.

The following day we expect the first lambs. In the wagon of the sheep-herder there is room for only one person; so the rest of us made our beds under the open sky.

In the gray dawn I put my head out from under

the piece of canvas protecting my blankets. The prairies were covered with new snow. Cold and snow are the worst things of all during the lambing season; so this does not look very promising.

It is an uncomfortable morning. The cold causes my teeth to beat the devil's tattoo; till I have put on enough clothes, so that I can decently run over to the wagon and get the fire started in our oven.

The heavens are gray and depressing, with the wind singing a sad dirge over the prairie; a few snowflakes are still falling aslant to the ground. Later on the air becomes somewhat warmer, the wind veers around more to the south, and the snowflakes no longer fall; but the same heaviness hangs in the air.

And then the lambs begin to come, one here and one there; and in the evening, when we had collected the mothers into a company by themselves, we count twenty lambs. A few are, of course, better cared for than many.

Late in the afternoon the foreman says to me: "You will go out and give them the care needed for the night." And hearing the howl of a coyote from far away among the hills he adds: "See to it that those beasts do not get them."

I take an armful of those flagstaffs, and go out and plant them around the new mothers. The flags flutter noisily in the evening wind. I light a fire and go away, feeling sure that this and the flags will keep the coyotes at a distance.

That night there are many lambs born. We are up early. I go over to take a look at those that had

come yesterday. All are there, inside of the circle of those flags, but dead; their throats torn by sharp teeth and their hearts torn out.

This was not exactly encouraging to the foreman; nor to me. These lambkins had in a way been entrusted to my care. "The coyote is fierce this year," says the boss; "we must be very careful." We are; but in spite of it many other lambs meet the same fate.

All of us have rifles; and we shoot whenever we see a coyote, no matter how far away it may be.

When a lamb is born, and the mother is frightened before she has a chance to smell of it, she does not afterward know it as her own. Such lambs die, in many cases, from want of nourishment. Those that are gifted with more sense save themselves by stealing a chance at the udder of some other accommodating wetnurse, generally when her lamb is similarly engaged on the other side.

Usually, however, these motherless ones are underfed as compared with those that get their regular supply of mother's milk.

There may in a flock of sheep be many such starving lambs, and at the same time a number of ewes with full udders, but no lamb.

To some extent this trouble may be remedied in this wise: When a lamb dies the skin may be taken off and fitted onto one of the motherless ones, like a coat with holes for the feet and tail and head. The ewe that has lost her lamb will, when it is brought to her, smell the skin of her offspring and at once adopt the motherless lamb. In a day or

two the coat may be taken off. If the weather is warm it must be done, else the flies will fill it with maggots.

I did this one day with a little shivering and hungry lambkin. I pitied it so much, for it was so little; and I had seen it again and again driven away by mothers without bowels of mercy, when its instinct urged it to take nourishment. Then the poor little thing stands there alone among the many, deserted and helpless, bleating for the mother that will not come and give it food and warmth.

So I covered it with the fleecy coat of another and found a mother for it. After that I naturally was specially interested in this particular lamb. It thrived so well that I could see the difference from day to day, and it was as lively as any of the lambs. I used to pick it up and make a pet of it whenever I had the time.

The coat is taken off; and the little lamb knows me so well that it comes to me, if the dog is not near. The mother ewe looks on with surprise.

The coyotes are so attentive that we must use every possible means to keep them at a safe distance. I am compelled to bring my blankets and to sleep outdoors among the sheep.

One morning I am awakened by some noise among them. I spring to my feet, and see two coyotes scattering the frightened sheep in all directions. Several lambs are lying dead where they went to rest last night, and among them my little pet.

And by the light of the sun, now just sending its

first rays out over the plain, I see that one of the two murderers wears a shining collar.

This is the first time I have seen King since his escape; tho I had heard news of him several times. He was so easily recognized by that collar.

It is a two days' journey to the grazing grounds for the summer up among the mountains. The coyotes migrate to the same place at the same time; for mutton is their favorite food and most easily procured. As soon as the lambs are big enough to walk so far we go to the mountain pastures.

Early in the morning after our setting out King and his mate kill two lambs, while I am sitting on my horse at some distance and seeing them do it. When we stop at our wagon for lunch I mention this matter to the other men; and the foreman swears that he has had enough of this brute, and is determined to make an end of it.

But to make an end of King is something more easily said than done. When we are settled among the mountains, King and his mate are there also; having there found a good place in which to take possession of a burrow for their own expected cubs.

I saw them several times, but never near; and many other herders also saw them. King had now grown so large as to be easily known even when so far away that the collar could not be seen.

Up here I have no chance to sleep in the wagon. It stands at the watering place, where all the sheep spend the warm hours of the day. Not till the cool of the afternoon do the sheep begin to eat their fill for the night. This meal lasts till dark. When

they can eat no more they lie down. And where they lie down, I also must take my rest; and nearly every night I must get up to drive the coyotes away.

It is pure pleasure to sleep out here when the weather is fine, and the moon or the stars shine down from the beautiful vault of heaven. But when the nights are wet and stormy, and I must spend one or two weary hours fighting the coyotes off, the poetry of this lonely life among the mountains is changed into the most tiresome prose.

The dog is the herder's one great friend during the long days and nights; and mine is a very good one. It has taught me more than one thing about the herding of sheep. But capable as it is as a sheep-dog, it is worth nothing against the coyotes. Probably it has at some time experienced that a set-to with a coyote is no joke.

Still, in daytime the dog is not so bad a helper. It will then at least make a dash after the coyotes as long as these run away; but when the coyote stops or turns, Sport comes home. There will be no argument, no fight. And when the dog is with me in the dark, and the coyotes howl near us, it will insist on trying to hide between my legs.

One glorious day I am lying under a tree up on a ridge, deeply interested in a book. Sport lies stretched out at my side, with eyes half closed, entirely satisfied with life and with himself. Three thousand sheep are scattered over the great plain. They stand nearly motionless in the heat of the day, like countless white spots dotting the green carpet. Suddenly I notice that the sheep far over to the

other side begin to huddle close together. And by straining my eyes I can just see that a little and a large coyote are herding and holding them there, running as it were in the arc of a wide circle, exactly as a trained dog does in bringing the scattered sheep together. I see at once that it is King and his mate, out to provide themselves with dinner, and that they are runnning in that way only to pick out the very best to be had in this great abundance of food.

I have the gun, but I know that I can not hit the mark from this distance. Besides, I want to have some fun with the dog. In a calm voice I call to Sport. He opens his eyes and looks sidewise at me without moving. "Sport," I say again; "go around there behind them, not too near." And I motioned with the right arm to show him which way to take. He does not relish the job. He gets up slowly and trots off in most leisurely fashion with his tongue out as far as it will go. He soon stops short and looks at me, plainly hoping that I will call him back. But I signal to him again to go on; and he does it in a lazy way, showing that his heart is not in it. He stops several times to give me a chance to countermand the order which he so much dislikes; but I sternly command him to go on.

I follow closely the movements of the dog, his lazy trot never once breaking into a run. I can picture to myself his half-closed eyes and his dull interest in the work before him.

Then the scene suddenly changes. The coyotes are coming right toward Sport, while he is half

asleep. He does not see them before they are close by. He stops for a tenth of a second, and then comes flying back, leaping over the hillocks of heather between which he had made his slow way. I see his tears flowing when he comes back to me. He understands that I have merely wanted to try him out; and he is highly offended, and lies down, and refuses to look at me.

In the meantime King and his mate continue doing havoc among the sheep; and I do not doubt that, later on, when their young cubs have arrived, the whole family will live entirely at the expense of our sheepowner.

The coyote differs from the wolf in this, that as a rule the coyote does not kill more sheep than it wants for food. But the present great abundance causes it to change its custom, and makes it more of a gourmand; for many a morning I find several lambs lying close together with their throats cut and the hearts torn out.

It does not seem so bad after all, as long as they kill only what they devour. I excuse them, for they interest me; and I know that such is their nature. But this wholesale slaughter of the lambs that I am paid to care for makes me regard the coyotes as all others do, and always to have my gun ready to my hand in order to kill when I can.

Veterans of the West, who have spent their life on the plains, insist that even when incredibly far away, the coyote can smell whether or not a man is carrying firearms. I have always smiled at this

statement; tho, really, it often would seem to be the sober truth.

Riding, driving, or on foot, I have many times come so near to coyotes that I could distinctly see even the glint in their eyes; but only when I have been unarmed. Whenever by chance or with a purpose I have carried a gun, they are not in evidence, or they keep at a safe distance.

My horse has a habit of lying down and rolling with the saddle on,—presumably for the purpose of getting it off. And I have a habit of letting the horse carry the rifle in the saddle holster.

One bright afternoon I dismount to investigate something over on the other side of a small ravine. It is but a few steps, and I do not bother to take the gun with me. Having satisfied my curiosity, I sit me down on the old trunk of a fallen tree and look about me. As I am sitting there, weighing something in my mind, a large coyote suddenly appears among the bushes, where it stands still and looks me over.

Instinctively I cast my eyes on the horse. It is near by, but on the farther side of the ravine; and I think an awful swear-word on seeing that the horse is about to roll over onto the gun. I shout, but this has no effect on the horse. The coyote takes to his heels; and as he turns I see the glint of something around his neck. It is a sunbeam reflected from the nickel trimming of his collar, now almost hidden by his splendid fur.

I run in the direction taken by the beast, and expect to see him crawl away among the bushes; but

there is no sign of him anywhere. There is no wind, and I would have noticed even the least stir of the bushes; and they are not high enough completely to hide the beast. I have no superstition about this mystery. I know that a man is a mere child in cunning as compared with the wild animals in the wild places. I know that King has successfully mastered some trick of which I am ignorant.

When I returned to my horse the gun stock was broken off just back of the trigger.

When animals are sick they seek solitude. Their dead bodies may be found in the most unthinkable places. A sick dog will crawl to some hiding place, and will sometimes for days refuse all food. The sheep, used from birth to being one of many, seems utterly lost when the others are out of sight. But when something is wrong with it, the sheep also will sneak away by itself and find a place where it can suffer alone.

I one day saw a sheep do this. Among the three thousand there are twenty black ones. I count these now and then to make sure that none is lost. It is one of these black sheep that sneaks away by itself.

These black sheep are too few anyway, and I should hate to lose any of them; so I follow the one in question and try to induce it to come back among the others. But the sheep is of another mind. It starts to run from me as soon as it understands my purpose; and it keeps on running till it thinks itself safe from me. This happened a few days after the time when my horse broke the stock of my gun.

Sheep generally have a stubborn disposition, and this seems to become even worse when they are sick. This particular sick animal wants to get away by itself; while I want it to come back, as its black fleece makes it especially valuable to me.

So I am just as persistent as the sheep, and keep following it, hoping to get it back among the others.

It chooses its path wisely over the worst ground, so that I am obliged to leave the horse behind me and follow on foot.

Suddenly two coyotes appear between me and the sheep. They stand there as if nothing were doing, merely looking and sniffing over toward the sheep and then toward me. And these two important imps of perdition seem entirely undisturbed. They trot slowly away like lazy dogs, as if knowing full well that I have no firearms with me. They were near enough for me to see distinctly that the neck of the larger one has a collar deep down in the fine fur.

They now make for the sheep, while I run to thwart their foul purpose. They make for it all the faster, and beat me to it; but the sheep shows fight when attacked by the smaller of the coyotes.

I run with all my might, shouting: "Bravo. Keep them off till I get there." And the sheep actually repels the attacks of the smaller coyote again and again. Once it even gives her a blow so that she rolls over in the dust.

Then King loses patience, either because of the plight of his mate, or because he sees me coming.

In one jump he reaches the sheep, catches its nose

between his jaws, as I sometimes have seen sheep-dogs do it, and throws the sheep to the ground. And in the next moment the blood is spouting out of a cruel wound in its throat.

The coyotes then run away; but no doubt they are standing somewhere near by and keeping an eye on me.

I poison the carcass with strychnine; for I know that the coyotes will come back to it when I am out of the way. I am as careful as possible not to touch it; in order that they may not catch any scent of me when they come back.

The following day I come again to see what had happened. The carcass was untouched. But I could see that the coyotes had been there; for they had scratched up some earth and scattered it over the carcass as if to ridicule my vain attempts on their life.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CATASTROPHE

MIDSUMMER is here with glorious days, the sun shining out of a cloudless, blue sky. There is a grand beauty over the foothills rising up to the dark belt of forest; and above this rise the snowfields and the gilded mountain peaks.

Occasionally the scene changes. A little cloud may appear as a black blotch on the blue sky; in half an hour it has grown to cover a large part of the heavens. There is a deluge of rain; and then the skies suddenly clear again.

Of an evening, when the last red light of day has turned into yellow, then into gray, and at last into black on the western horizon, thunder is heard from the mountains close by, or its rumbling is heard from far away.

Sheep do not like the hot weather; on such days they are fearfully lazy. They want to lie around the watering place all day. From nine or ten o'clock in the morning till four or five in the afternoon they refuse to stir; and then they feed till late at night to satisfy their incredible appetite.

Sheep have less sense than many other animals; but only a few of the others have such capacity of stomach in proportion to their size. Whether it is this surprising greediness or their want of sense

which sometimes in moonlit nights induces them to start off on an excursion across the plains, I can not pretend to know. Many times I wake up in the middle of the night, either from habit or from hearing the howl of a coyote, and find myself alone with the dog.

The coyotes continue their atrocities with an energy which never fails them.

It seems as if every coyote in the mountains always keeps close to the feeding grounds of the sheep. The herders complain; and the sheep owners hire professional hunters and trappers. But in spite of everything—poison and traps and lead and trained dogs—the coyotes continue to give the herders much trouble, and to cause heavy losses to the owners.

It is not only that the beasts kill and eat many. But on dark nights, when it rains, or when the wind howls among the forest trees, it often happens after a visit from the coyotes that great numbers of the sheep have separated themselves from the main flock; and then the beasts of prey get them. Or they run around without a leader until they stumble on some other sheep and join forces with them.

This last happening improves the situation somewhat, but it still is bad enough. Every owner has his sheep branded. But in order that each may get his own, the great flock of sheep must be rounded up into a corral; and this means hard work for the herders and a severe strain on the sheep and lambs.

Up to this time I had been lucky enough to escape any wholesale losses; but I am all the time uneasy

and on my guard, for I know that my turn may come at any time.

One evening after a very hot day, which the sheep had spent lying lazily in the shade by the watering place, I notice that a storm is coming.

It begins with lightning flashes coming closer and closer, while the peals of thunder fairly make the earth tremble. I have seen it coming, and have pulled on my oilcloth coat and hat. The sheep crowd close together, as they always do in stormy weather, without lying down. I and my dog go around bent double against the wind, listening to the howling of the storm and of the coyotes, and trying to see as much as we can of the situation whenever a flash of lightning cuts thru the darkness. Generally a storm does not last long at this season of the year, but on this particular night it seemed determined to keep it up forever. A half hour goes and is followed by another, and yet another, unceasingly.

Whenever there is a lull, just after a peal of thunder has died like an echo among the ravines, we hear the wild howls of the coyotes.

Around midnight the storm is at its worst, and so are the coyotes. These seem to have been waiting half the night for the time when the storm should be raging most fiercely.

I have always liked the coyotes and their nightly concerts; they have given me a sort of pleasant sensation, as being expressive of the wild and free. I like to hear these sounds on going to bed, to be

awakened by them in the night, and to be greeted by them again in the gray light of early dawn.

But this stormy night it was another story. These long, discordant howls, generally so pleasant in my ears, have become so serious a matter, so fraught with danger, that it seems as if a tragedy were lowering over me.

The sheep seem to share my anxiety. They do not stand as still as they usually do in a storm; they are moving all the time and huddling close together. The bells hanging around the necks of some of them do not have room to give out a clear tinkle.

Then for a time there is silence. The thunder ceases; and the coyotes that have been howling near by keep their peace. I hasten to the rescue; for when the coyotes have been howling and keeping watch near a flock of sheep, and then suddenly stop their noise, it nearly always means that the robbers are coming nearer.

Experience has taught me this lesson, and it comes true this time also. The catastrophe is upon us.

The coyotes are among the sheep; and I, whose business it is to guard these animals, am almost helpless. I can hear how the sheep run and bleat and how the bells jingle when one of the leaders jumps over the others; but I can see nothing.

I hurry till I am bathed in sweat, trying to keep the sheep together. I order the dog to circle around them; tho I know that he will not obey when the coyotes are near. I fire my rifle again and again, but nothing comes of it. The sheep are in a

panic. Their circle is widened and then broken; and a flash of lightning just then illuminating the scene, I see three thousand sheep running for their lives in all directions.

I am up all night, stumbling about in the dark, and getting together again as many as I can. I have only the bells to guide me. When at last the day breaks and the storm ceases, and I am able to count my black sheep, seven of the nineteen are gone.

I can not leave the sheep which I still have to go hunting for the others; and two days pass before the foreman joins me.

Three days later he finds a flock of eight hundred sheep at a place twelve miles away.

I can not say positively that King was responsible for this outrage; but he has of late been committing so many unlawful acts that suspicion at once falls on him.

In reporting to the owner the foreman swore that the tragedy had been caused by that infamous coyote with the collar. This brings King into greater disrepute than ever. And the ranch-owners having promised an extra large prize for the fur of the brute, with the collar as proof of his identity, poor King is hereafter hunted by everybody as the worst of outlaws.

There are many ways of hunting the coyote. To run it down with fast dogs, such as the wolf hound and the grey hound, is probably the most effective way out on the open plains; but in the mountains, where there are countless deep ravines with per-

pendicular sides, where there are streams to cross, and where patches of forest interfere with the run and with the outlook, the usual means of hunting is with poison or with traps.

However, these methods also have their disadvantages. In the summer the mountain pastures are full of sheep, and with each bunch of these there is at least one dog; and the poison and the traps are just as dangerous to the dog as to the coyote or the wolf.

I have many traps in the wagon; but for the sake of the dog I dare not use them. The dog has a very inquisitive turn of mind. Often I am obliged to shout hard at it to keep it from smelling of the rattlesnakes—the rattlesnakes, which nearly all other animals, wild or tame, fear and shun as death itself.

One day I ride some miles down the river to catch some trout for my dinner. The sun is warm as I ride home. I am half asleep in my saddle, when I am aroused by the horse's stopping short and pricking up its ears. I look in the same direction and see a little and a big coyote trotting westward up on the brow of a ridge, each of them with one of my lambs between its jaws. They are on their way home with dinner for their young.

It does not look as if King's progeny were in danger of dying out for want of food.

I have no chance to do any damage to the coyotes with a rifle shot from this distance. But I know the habits of the beasts. I know that they will, if feasible, keep on top of the ridge, from

which they will have the wider view; so I gallop to the end of this ridge, leave the horse in a hollow, and hide myself carefully behind a big boulder.

I lie flat on my stomach, expecting at any moment to see King and his mate come into view; for I feel sure that they have not seen me.

But minutes pass, and still the beasts do not come. I give it up; feeling sure that they have changed their course. I go to get into my saddle and ride home; but the horse is not to be found. I climb a tree the better to look about me; and far away on the road I see the horse being chased by a large coyote.

King probably had seen me as soon as I saw him, or even sooner. But he had pretended not to see me, in order to lead me on a fool's errand.

At a distance of fifty feet from the wagon a spring of clear water bubbles up out of the ground. I had at this place dug a shallow cellar, four or five feet square; in which I had arranged some shelves for butter and other such eatables that do not like the heat. I spent some time on this work, making everything as convenient as I could, and then covered the cellar over with branches.

During the summer there are also in the mountains great herds of cattle; and to keep these away from my provisions I drive stakes into the earth around my larder, and build a strong fence of saplings. This will keep out the cows and horses, the only animals against which I must use these precautions. So I think at least; till I come home one day and find my jar of butter and my other food in a

sad state of disorder. My fence is intact; so the havoc can not have been wrought by horses or cattle. I make a closer examination, and the tracks in the wet earth tell the true story. There are the footmarks of a big and a little coyote. The paw of King is half as big again as that of his mate.

I have often marvelled at the fact that this one coyote, that is so young, shows such shameless impudence and such sly cunning in all his adventures. He is now specially sought after by all herders and others in these parts, by reason of the money in it and by reason of his peculiar infamy.

The talk about King's exploits, his audacity and cunning, his wolf-like propensity to kill more than he can devour, has made him known far and wide. The more I see and hear of it, the more certain I am that his mate is the wily leader; that she lays the plans, and he carries them out; that it is her older brain which directs them safely thru all dangers; that it is her trained instinct which defeats all our well laid plans to have their life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A COSTLY SHOT

STUBB, our foreman, is the best shot I ever have seen. He was born and has grown up on the plains. In our war with Spain he served in the cavalry, and was awarded a medal for his skill with the rifle. He never uses a shot-gun, not even when shooting birds. He clips the heads clean off the prairie chickens. If on rare occasions it happens that the ball goes thru any other part of their body, he never brings the bird home with him.

No man is better acquainted than is Stubb with all the wild things of the prairie. He is a master in the art of setting traps and snares without leaving on them any scent of his hands. And many a wolf and coyote has lost its life thru eating meat which Stubb had poisoned.

But all his cunning with traps and poison seems to be of no account against these two robbers, King and his wise mate. He has tried every trick known to the hunter. He has sworn to have the scalps of the two beasts before the sheep next fall are taken back to the grazing lands down on the prairie.

When he has satisfied himself that he can do nothing by means of traps and poison, he tries to think out some other way; and the coveted money prize stimulates his inventive genius.

The coyote has the habit of sniffing at everything which it smells, even when not driven to it by hunger. The beast seems to be so inquisitive that it will smell of everything which it finds, and bite into it with no thought of eating it; or it will touch the thing with its foot after the manner of a dog.

Stubb knows this, and makes use of the knowledge.

In the wagon there is an old shot gun whose barrel has been sawed off to the length of barely one foot. Stubb hides this gun in the brush; and to the trigger he fastens a cord with a piece of meat at its other end.

He knows that the coyotes will catch the scent of this meat, and will sniff at it and touch it; and the gun points straight at the meat. But he knows also that they will be able to detect the smell of gun and powder, and so the outcome of his experiment will depend on a combination of circumstances.

In the evening when King's deep bass and his mate's piercing soprano have echoed thru the ravines, I lie there and listen. I fall asleep and wake up again without having heard the report of the gun. But toward morning the gun goes off, the report rolling like an echo over the hills. I see a faint suggestion of dawn in the east; and I hurriedly get some clothes on and go out to see what has happened.

There is plain proof that the coyotes first had examined the gun; for some branches with which Stubb had thought the better to hide it have been pulled from their place. The coyotes had been ex-

tremely careful; they would seem to be fully aware that anything smelling of powder and man is dangerous. Still they could not resist the temptation to tamper with the meat. They have nibbled at it, but standing as far as possible to one side; and so when the gun goes off they escape with nothing worse than a fright.

"Luck was with them tonight," I said to Stubb on meeting him that morning. He insists that those brutes knew which was the dangerous end of the gun, and that they had intentionally pulled the trigger, keeping themselves outside of the danger zone.

But Stubb is not ready to admit defeat. In this first experiment there had been nothing wrong with his calculations, excepting that the shot missed the mark.

So Stubb busies himself trying to think out some new trick; and in a day or two he has an idea which is sure to make a final end of King and his wife.

He goes out in the morning with the same sawed-off shotgun, with pick and spade on his shoulder and a small sack of powder on his back.

He is going to prepare a mine. In order not to excite the suspicion of the coyotes by digging too much he empties the powder sack into the burrow of a badger, which he has stopped up at the depth of a couple of feet. Then he plants the gun, pointing downward and loaded to the muzzle, into the powder mine. The coyotes are to fire the gun as before, and the gun is to fire the mine.

It is a shrewd plan. If the brutes come, as they

did before, and tug at the bait, they will without question be damaged beyond repair.

In order to mislead them he shoots a rabbit, lets it lie and bleed on the earth with which he has stopped up the burrow, and then fastens the body of the rabbit to the short string tied to the trigger.

In obedience to the almanac the sun goes down, and I hear the familiar voice of King coming out of the west. Then I see him on a distant ridge, distinctly silhouetted against the red evening sky. I feel a sneaking sympathy for the beast as I think of the powder mine prepared for him.

He may now be singing his last song to the setting sun. This night he and his beloved mate may be blown up into the sky in order to fall down as dead carrion. I do not sleep well that night. I wake up time and again thinking that I have heard the mine go off.

However, it does not happen; and in the morning we go out to investigate the matter. There are many footmarks, big and little, around the body of the rabbit, showing that the two brutes had been there; but the meat had apparently not been touched. They have been made wise by experience.

The scare on the night when the gun went off has probably been so great that the memory of it now cures them of the desire to touch anything smelling of man.

We know that they have their home somewhere down in the ravine; but this is broad and deep and long, and we do not know exactly where their burrow may be.

Stubb regrets that he had not given all his mind to finding their home at the time just after the cubs came.

In September we are to move the sheep down from the hills. There is not much time left; and Stubb must hurry if he is to carry out his fell purpose. He is out on the hunt early and late. Sometimes he spends the whole day down in the ravine, but nothing comes of it.

The autumn fogs begin to come. In a week or two our stay up here will be at an end.

At the bottom of the ravine Stubb has found many well-worn tracks. In all of them he sets his traps, and he tells me always to keep my dog near me.

One evening he and I sit by the wagon, smoking a pipe after our evening meal. The sun is just going down; red and dull, so that we can look it straight in the face, as at the moon, without blinking.

Suddenly we hear King's deep bass howl, sounding faintly from far away. By straining our eyes we can see him up on the ridge, right against the sun, with his side toward us, and howling toward heaven.

"He would be a fine target," I said, "were he but a little nearer."

Stubb catches up his rifle and adjusts the long distance sight; not as being confident that he can do any execution from this distance, but as being merely curious to see how near he can come to hitting the mark.

I watch him and see the strained muscles of his face, as he looks along the barrel. He takes aim for a long time without pulling the trigger. Then he gets down on one knee, resting an elbow on the other.

I look up again; and King is still standing there barking at the heavens. I feel keenly how he fits into the picture—over there against the dying sun.

In my thoughts I thank him for the many times he has sung to me, the song of the great solitude; and in my secret heart I am glad that he is so far away.

Then I hear the crack of the rifle; and we can see how the coyote turns a complete somersault backward.

"You hit him, I think," I faintly remark.

"No; and I did not expect it either. But I missed him only by a scratch."

I lie awake thru the greater part of that night. I hear the howling of coyotes on all hands; but not once do I hear what I am listening for: the familiar tones of King.

In the morning I am driven to start out on a tour of investigation. My heart is pounding in my breast as I expect every moment to stumble across the carcass of the robber, who had caused me so much trouble, but of whom I could not help being fond nevertheless.

I do not find the body; but among the bunchgrass dotting the gray earth I see bloodspots. I follow these as far as I can, till they are lost in the ravine.

Nor do we hear the familiar voice on the follow-

ing nights; but the sharper voice of his mate comes to us over the hills like a long wail and an accusation.

One evening a week later I discover that King still is living. I am walking up the bed of a dry creek, against the wind, and in one of the many twists and turns I see the two of them at supper.

They run away as soon as they see me, she in the lead. As poor King follows his usual zigzag path between the mounds I see what the rifle had done to him, and why he for some days has not been in evidence. One of his forepaws has been shot off right below the knee.

After this time we do not see him often. He seems to have become more cautious; as he needs to be, owing to the loss of a foot. And when I hear him at night it seems to me that his big voice has in it a peculiarly mournful trembling.

A few days more, and we must migrate down to the plains.

It does not look as if Stubb would be able to redeem his promise to rid us of those coyotes; still he steadily persists in the effort.

It may be that King's spirit is broken, so that he is less cautious; or he may no longer have the strength to follow his mate up hill and down dale among the mountains.

I have always held that the strength of these two coyotes lay in her cunning and his prowess. But the loss of the foot has sapped his vigor; and this seems to have lessened his courage, or at least his hardihood. He is no longer able to keep up with her,

be guided by her greater experience, and warned by her easily aroused suspicion.

He may have been hungry, poor fellow; and hard as it must be for him to provide himself with food, he has one day—or rather night—been sniffing at one of Stubb's appetizing pieces of bait, and carelessly or clumsily got a foot into the trap, whose strong steel jaws then closed on it and held him fast.

The trap is fastened by a chain to a fencepost. It takes strength to pull all this over the uneven ground. But incredible as it seems, King with his three feet, and one of these in the trap, had been able to drag the whole thing with him toward his home in the ravine.

I was with Stubb on his trip that day.

"We will surely get him today," he shouts when he sees that the trap is gone; "no other coyote would be able to pull such a load."

In some excitement we follow the marks made by the trap and the post clear to the edge of the ravine.

Right on the brink the post has got in the brush. The chain hangs down taut over the edge above the deep gorge; and there, hanging in the trap by the remaining forepaw, is King's dead body.

The head is turned to one side; and the eyes are open, looking unseeingly out over the ravine, which has so often been his safe refuge in time of danger. He has turned to it now in his agony; and in the recklessness of despair he has taken the fatal leap to get away from his human enemies. Or he

may have thought to rid himself of his burden by jumping over the brink.

And so there is an end of the life history of this coyote. He did not live to be old, but his short life was full of adventure.

We stay but a few days more in the mountains; for autumn is here, and the fog hangs heavy over us day and night.

But every night we hear the mate of King calling to him in wailing tones. Night after night she howls her despair, so that the echo of it comes to us from the walls of the ravine.

She is answered from far and near, but not by the one to whom she is calling; his voice is forever stilled.

His progeny, however, is living. They have inherited his prowess and cunning, and will sometime make themselves feared, as their sire was, by the sheep-owners.

It would seem that even the most persistent persecution on the part of man is not able to bring about the extermination, or thin the numbers, of these most interesting animals.

Out of the lonely and endless plains they live and thrive, and successfully pit their cunning against that of man.

For the coyotes are wonderfully wise; and they learn more and more of cunning as civilization presses in upon them, and as the generations come and go.

Their habitat has always been almost where it is

now; it seems never to have reached much farther east.

Civilization has encroached to some extent on the territorial integrity of their country; but the coyotes, like the Indians, fight for every inch of their native soil, and do it with greater success.

As soon as we reach these wild solitudes the coyotes are in evidence. Out on the wide plains, or where the foothills rise in fantastic shapes up toward the mountains, in the biting storms of winter and in the fierce heat of summer, the howl of the coyote is in the land.

The coyote sings when the sun goes down; it sings to the moon, and to the stars studding the dark heavens. There are songs of praise at the break of day. But they seem to sing in derision at night when a lonely campfire flares up in the dark solitude.

A TRAGEDY OF THE PRAIRIE

CHAPTER ONE

MOTHER-LOVE

IT IS a day in winter. For three days a snow-storm has been raging over the prairie. The tufts of heather are covered with snow, the hollows are smoothened out, and great drifts have been swept together in the ravines.

For three days the heavens have been hid; a storm from the north has howled unceasingly over the treeless plains. It is in winter, when the snow is a foot deep on the prairie, that the animals suffer, of hunger and cold. Then the struggle for existence is most fierce; the weak must die, and the strong survive.

A herd of many hundred cows painfully make head thru the storm. They are not the kind of cows found on a farm in the states farther east. They give no milk; they are in a wild or half-wild state. They belong to somebody, and as calves they have been branded; but they live their life as free as any other wild animal—till they are turned into beef for our dinners.

Some are killed by wild beasts; and some are killed by hunger and cold, and are eaten by the beasts of prey, which are too weak or timid to attack them living. Generally the cattle manage to live thru the winter on the dry grasses of the prairie. But

some winters are too severe for them, with heavy snows and bitter winds all the time; winters as merciless as death itself.

The winter which I have in mind was one of the stormy and long ones. We had snow and wind nearly all the time, for days and weeks; even for months. There were some few clear days, but these were always bitter cold.

The great plain is a limitless ocean of snow, a blanket of white as far as the eye can reach. It sparkles in golden colors when the sun shines, but is like a white pall when the gray sky hangs low and threatening over the prairie.

The great herd of cattle winds slowly thru the snow. Thus they have been struggling for days and weeks; fighting against the elements, the invincible.

All this time the cows have sustained life on the heather and grass they have found by scraping away the snow; and on the surplus fat which they put on during the summer, when the grass was green and plentiful. But now the fat has long since been consumed in the strenuous work of scraping thru the snow for every poor blade of dry grass. The cows are reduced to skin and bones. They are walking skeletons covered with loose hides. However, miserable as they are, they still want to live. They do not surrender till they must. They fight hard against snow and storm and bitter cold, against hunger and misery. Having no imagination, no power to think, they can not be supposed to fight in hopes of something better. Their struggle is mere-

ly instinctive; they obey nature's first law, the instinct of self-preservation.

They follow nature; but nature turns upon them and persecutes them. The severe winters are one of the means used by nature for thinning the ranks of the living. The weak must go under, and the strong survive; and so the race grows better and stronger. Thus nature keeps the numbers down. When the winter is severe on the herbivorous animals it is severe on the carnivorous beasts also. When the denizens of the prairie have a famine they have it all together. Generally their life is one of too great abundance or one of want. In summer the cattle wallow in food, while winter is a season of want and death.

When winter is severe and food scarce the coyotes have a habit of keeping close to the lean and hungry cattle in order to eat such as lie down and die. Usually the coyotes will not attack a cow that is full-grown, but they follow at a distance, follow her all day and all night. At times they follow without making the least sound, and then again they howl threateningly; always ready for a carnival of feasting whenever the poor cow is no longer able to keep on her feet.

The heavy snowstorm has lasted three days and nights; and all this time hundreds of famished cows have drifted with the storm. When the storm is especially severe, and the cows are too tired to walk farther, they seek shelter in some ravine, but never for a long time. For hunger tears at their vitals

and otherwise tortures them,and will give them no peace.

The strongest break camp, and the others follow. The last to leave the shelter is a lean cow, with a calf that is half dead of hunger.

The calf is a little bit of a thing, much smaller than the others. It came later into the world, and has never enjoyed the best of health.

The other cows are far on their way, stretched out into long files or scattered as black spots over the white blanket, before the old cow begins to stir, and turns her head to look after her calf, which is not yet on its feet. The cow goes on, and then again turns and looks with big and sad eyes at her progeny, but still the calf does not move. Its strength is exhausted, and it no longer cares. Even the two coyotes, sitting in the snow and waiting, no longer mean anything to the starved calf. Some days ago these beasts would have driven it to seek safety in the very thickest of the herd. But now hunger and cold have made it callous to everything. Death is fastening on the little famished body. But mother love is strong in the heart of the cow. The calf is some months old, but the mother still cares tenderly for it. The calf has from birth been undersized and weak; and the mother has had to protect it against the other calves. For that reason also these two had always kept close together. Probably this was one reason why the mother love had not weakened, but had been kept strong and had remained as new as it had been when the calf for

MOTHER-LOVE

the first time fastened its soft muzzle on the cow's udder.

The cow would not think of going away and leaving the calf behind her. When it does not move she calls to it. In our ears this sad "moo-oo" is merely the lowing of cattle, but between a cow and her calf it is big with meaning.

Now it is a cry from the heart in uttermost distress; a mother calling despairingly to her offspring. The calf makes an effort to rise from its bed deep in the snow, but sinks back; its legs will not support it, and the snow gives it but a poor foothold.

As the calf tries to rise the coyotes also spring to their feet: and when it sinks back into the snow they sit down again. These beasts of prey are in no hurry, now when the winter storms make life so hard. They are content to bide their time. They are sure of the outcome, and so they are patient as death. And they hang on like grim death, confident of finally being rewarded. All they need is patience; at the end of it there is food. And food is the life. Other animals must die that the coyote may live. They must shed their life-blood, that the blood in the veins of the coyote may run strong and full.

The coyote's tenacity of life, while other animals succumb, is wonderful, something incredible. They, too, are reduced to mere bone and sinew; but their gray and fine and long-haired coats hide the lean skeletons. The coyotes may go for days without food. They can do with little when little is to be had; and when there is abundance they revel in gluttony.

When the cow sees that the calf sinks back into the snow she turns and comes back. She will not leave it; this her mother-love will not permit. She does not see any way of helping the calf, but she must not desert it. She sees the coyotes, and knows well enough what it is they are waiting for.

The cow seems to say something in a low guttural tone, and the calf makes another abortive effort to rise. Then the cow resolutely lifts it to its feet.

And so they start out on their weary way thru the snow and storm. The cow breaks the path, and the calf follows on unsteady legs. And behind them come the coyotes. The rest of the herd of cattle have long since disappeared in the storm, but their tracks can still be followed.

It is in the afternoon, but darkness has already begun to settle down over the plain. Nothing is seen but snow, and nothing heard but the howling of the storm above them. The cow does not stop to search for food; she has not the time. She is nearly dead of hunger, but will not stop to find a bunch of grass. The one thing of importance is to reach the rest of the herd before night. She is used to being with the others; and to be there in the herd is to be well protected. In union there is strength. None knows this better than does the cow. She is fully aware also that behind her stalks death in the form of two famished coyotes.

The cow is old, and has spent all her life on the plains; she has seen and learnt much. She knows that coyotes following the herd for days in a winter storm spell death to the animal left behind.

There is no salvation now but in catching up with the herd. This is her one hope, to realize which she exhausts her last bit of strength.

Thus an hour passes—and another. Twilight comes; and the lone cow and calf have not caught up with the herd. Nor can she catch their scent; for she is going south, with the storm. And every other sound is swallowed up by the howling of the wind; tho from some place far behind them the cry of a coyote is heard thru the shrieking of the storm. The two coyotes just behind the cow and calf stop to answer the cry. They want no company; would in fact prefer to be but the two of them when the calf drops dead. But they answer the cry of their fellows; in obedience to a law which is stronger than reason, an inherited, inevitable instinct. And the howl of the coyotes pierces the marrow and bone of the cow and her calf, cuts thru their heart and brain. It is death which howls at their heels—the death which they also dread, but without knowing what it is. And the fear of death strikes the cow like a flash of lightning. The tired muscles respond; she makes a desperate effort to increase her speed, with her nerves tingling from fear.

It lasts but a moment; a few steps on the run, and her strength is gone. Weak and weary they again drag themselves slowly onward.

When the coyotes have satisfied their instinct by howling they again follow at the heels of the cow and calf. The coyotes are not afraid to let their quarry leave them some distance behind; for the coyotes are a light weight, and can run on top

of the snow. Sometimes one of them in a spirit of bravado disports itself in front of the cow, or runs at her side on top of the snow, thru which she must plow her way.

So they go till it is quite dark. Cow, calf, and coyotes are coated with ice.

They come to a small ravine. The snow is deeper there; but under the overhanging ledge there is shelter. The storm passes over their heads. The calf drops to the ground, and will make no further effort to rise. In despair the cow urges it to come on; but the calf is too far gone to obey. It closes its eyes and rests its head on the snow. Then the mother comes back, sniffs at her calf once or twice, and sinks down at its side. The coyotes also stop short. Then they sneak as near as they dare. Having satisfied themselves that the cow and calf still are alive, they dig themselves down into the snow some little distance from the spot in order to wait —and wait.

CHAPTER TWO

TO THE RESCUE

IN the morning the storm is over, and the light of a pale sun shines on the fields of snow. The air is bitter cold. At the earliest sign of dawn the coyotes had crawled out of their bed in the snow.

Since then they have been running to and fro, or they have merely been engaged in watchful waiting. Their hot breath rises like white smoke into the cold air. Hunger is gnawing at their vitals; but never for a moment do they feel disposed to leave the cow and calf which they have followed so long, and to seek other food. They know—in so far as brute beasts can know anything—that patient persistence must win at last. They sit there like dogs, keeping an eye on the snowdrift in which the cow and calf are sheltered. They sit there with bright eyes, breathing hard, as after a long race, with excitement or expectation, and with the long tongue hanging red and moist out of the open mouth.

Only the head of the cow can be seen. Not till the sun is up does she move and get to her feet, and shake the snow off her freezing body. She sniffs at the calf, roots with her nose in the snow, and utters her low "Moo-oo." And now the calf is able to get up and stand without the help of the mother.

It is faint with hunger, but the long rest has put some new strength back into the young limbs.

Then begins again the endless struggle onward. It is even worse than it was the day before. Snow has filled the tracks made by the herd going before the storm. At every step the cow sinks deep, so that her shrunken belly touches the snow. This is the most cruel trial of all, particularly when the fields of snow stretch without a break as far as the eye can reach.

It is a good thing that the mother cow does not have the power to think. A man may realize that a certain thing is impossible, but a cow does not. Therefore she persists in attempting the impossible.

As long as there is life in man there is hope. Hope sustains him till death comes to his relief. While there is life in the beasts there is life; and they are sustained, not by hope, but merely by life, till they die.

The fearful strain of it, the bitter pull thru the deep snow, does not frighten the cow; it only tires her. She does not see death in the snowfield; for she, fortunately, has no imagination. She sees death only in those living enemies, the coyotes following at her heels; of these she has an instinctive dread.

The cow keeps looking for the rest of the herd, of which she yesterday was a part; but they are nowhere to be seen, nor does any wind carry to her nostrils the news of their whereabouts.

The two condemned animals struggle onward, the calf following close after the mother, till the sun is in the meridian. Hunger tortures the poor little

beast; its eyes shine big and hot with fever from the sunken sockets. Both the animals sweat from weariness; and the sweat at once turns to ice on their lean backs.

Tho insistently tortured by hunger they do not search for food. The cow knows that there is no use in searching for it where the snow is so deep. They must wait, and go on and on, till they find a place swept more nearly bare.

So they continue, till the sun is low, and till it goes down. The landscape then suddenly seems so deserted; there is a strange, blue loneliness upon it. There is something heavy, depressing, lowering over it between sundown and twilight; something felt rather than seen; something impressive and mysterious, which embraces it all just before darkness comes.

The stillness of death broods over the plain. But soon this quiet is again broken by the barking of the coyotes. They may be singing farewell to the sun, or they may be greeting the dark night. Probably, however, they are crying for food, complaining to high heaven of their intolerable hunger.

Now the night is pitch dark; tho the snow casts a shimmer of faint light over the earth, while myriads of bright stars stud the dark vault of heaven.

The moon makes its appearance on the eastern horizon, and climbs upward with a speed noticeable to the naked eye. It throws a pale light over the plains. The light grows gradually stronger. It

fills all space, and illuminates the heavens; and the stars become pale and die.

And in the midst of this beautiful winter scene a cow and her calf are dying of hunger. The calf lies there with limbs pulled close together, in order to make the most of what heat there is in the lean body. The mother cow lies down right by her offspring to give it some of her own warmth, which she sadly needs for herself.

The calf plainly has given up the struggle. It is no longer tortured by hunger; it is too far gone for that, and has hungered too long. The pain of it is over. Now the calf is only tired. It wants to lie there. The instinct of self-preservation is dead.

It is as with a man suffering from sea-sickness; for all he cares they may pitch him overboard.

The cow seems to be not quite so far gone; tho she also is close to the border-line. She does not feel her hunger as keenly as she did. There is a numbness in place of the painful gnawing at the vitals. She, also, is tired unto death; but in her starved heart the first law of nature still faintly obtains.

While the mother and her calf lie there in the snow under the light of the moon, fighting their very last fight, the coyotes sit near by and sing their slow and sad dirge. An answer comes from out on the plain. The sound carries far in the still air over the wintry prairie and brings to the ears of the cow a cruel message. It is death that is howl-

ing, and the sound of it trembles in the cold air of night.

One result of the cry is that other coyotes come. Now there are four of them; all hungry—desperately, ravenously hungry. As the night grows older they grow more audacious; they always gain courage when they are many. These four now sit around the dying animals, licking their chops, enjoying the sight of them, greedily breathing the smell of them. But the wait is too long. The coyotes become impatient of the persistence with which those two starved beasts cling to life. For the coyotes also are famished. Their empty bowels ache and complain, and their long tongues hang down and stretch out as tho already revelling in the taste of blood. Their eyes flash fire, and they even smack their lips noisily with hot desire.

As time goes by their hunger makes them still more audacious. They edge nearer to the calf, one step at a time. But when they are as near as the cow will have them she makes as if she were going to get up. And the coyotes retire, but only to come on again as soon as the cow lies quiet by the side of her calf.

And so it goes thru the first half of the night. The moon is now at its highest and lights up the stage on which is being played one of the tragedies of the plain.

One of the latest comers among the coyotes has more courage than the others, and is also larger and stronger. It refuses to starve with food right before its eyes. So it steals over to the calf on the

side where the cow is not, and at last induces her to get up and defend her offspring.

The other coyotes then also take courage and follow the brave example. One such is enough to make them take the offensive. They crowd in upon the poor cattle, and present the first scene in the last act of this tragedy.

The large coyote growls, and pounces on the calf, now too weak to get up. But the mother's heart has room for only one purpose—to defend her calf. A spark of life flares up in her, and the limbs that were deadly tired now obey blindly. With a bellow of rage she makes an onslaught on the largest of the coyotes and puts it to rout.

However, the other three beasts attack from the other side. They snarl and hiss a most infernal discord, such as only the coyotes can produce. The hairs of the neck stiffen, and the lips are turned back and expose the long, white, and cruel fangs. They smell meat, and in anticipation they already taste blood. Again and again the harassed cow turns on the beast which ventures nearest to the calf. But she has difficulty in moving thru the deep snow, while the coyotes walk on top of the crust. No sooner has she driven one away than another is upon her from the other side. Famished and tired as the cow already is, the fight can not last long. Like demons the coyotes leap this way and that, snarling furiously. The poor cow is all but utterly helpless; the brutes are too quick for her. Her sober reason tells her to run away, but her mother-love says no. She can not leave her calf behind.

And while she is steaming with the hard exercise and bellowing with rage, and makes a dash at the coyotes when these come too near the calf, this poor thing lifts its head to see what is doing. But at this moment two sharp fangs sink into its neck. The calf remains lying in the same place; it was nearly dead before it died. Not a muscle moves under the loose hide, and there is heard no complaint. The only motion is a bubbling in the throat, from which the blood gushes forth and colors the snow red. As soon as the coyotes smell blood they all push forward. In their ravenous hunger they are now so fierce that the cow can no longer keep them at a distance.

The cow understands all right what has happened to her calf, that its life has been snuffed out.

So with her last remaining strength she pulls herself together and leaves the scene; with weary steps and hanging head continuing her march over the endless sea of snow.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FINISH

FOR the latter half of the night the poor cow has peace. The coyotes gorge themselves, filling their famished stomachs to utter repletion with the bloody meat. Then the reaction sets in; they become heavy and drowsy, and dig themselves down into the snow to sleep and digest.

While the coyotes are sleeping away the effects of their too abundant meal, the lone cow continues her course, and does not stop till morning. She is not used to being alone, and the loneliness now frightens her. Nothing stirs on any side; she seems to be the only living thing in a dead world. The full moon no longer lights up the snowy landscape, but has hid itself behind a cloud. The sharp cold is tempered by a mild and moist breeze from the south. The cow looks for a place where she may lie down to rest. There is nothing else which she now needs so badly; her strength is utterly exhausted. Since midnight she has been walking, not because she had the strength to do it, but because the fear of death had put life into her last spark of energy.

Now she has reached the utmost limit; muscles and nerves tremble, her breathing is labored, and black spots are dancing before her burning eyes.

To lie down and stretch the aching limbs is just now the one supreme want—more important than life itself.

And so she lies there in the snow when dawn comes, and when the coyotes cry out their greeting to the new day. Even at this sound she does not attempt to rise; her abject misery has killed even the instinct of self-preservation. She remains lying there, even when the full light of day has come. It is a murky day with no rift in the gray clouds, thru which no sun is seen; nothing but somber gray everywhere. Later in the day the four coyotes appear, keeping in the path made by the cow. They have slept and rested, and are ready to resume the hunt. The death of the calf has put new life into them. They follow the tracks till they reach the cow.

She gets their wind before she sees them. She lifts her head and looks at them, seemingly with no emotion, as having already given up the struggle. Her sad eyes seem to say: "Do your worst, you miserable murderers." The coyotes gather about her as if to take a better look before killing her. They treat their eyes to a sight of her last agony. The largest of the beasts comes so near that its hot breath is blown right into the cow's nostrils. This seems to rouse her to a last, dying effort. With the trifle strength remaining she gets her hind legs under her, but the other legs refuse to obey. She makes repeated trials, but each time they fail her, and she must steady herself by putting her head down into the snow. For the coyotes this is the

opportune time. They fasten their fangs into the lean shanks and tear some meat out of them while the poor cow is still alive.

Then with a heart-rending groan she sinks into the snow, never to rise again. And the coyotes devour her flesh and drink her blood.

She had lived long and learnt much, and knew how to care for herself in the many vicissitudes of life. She might now have gone on living much longer, had she had herself alone to care for. Her mother-love had caused her to give her life in the fight to defend her offspring.

So in a way she died an heroic death; tho it was followed by no funeral, with weeping and flowers. Her bones were polished clean by the teeth of the coyotes.

When the snow melts, her old skeleton may be found by some wayfarer on the prairie. An occasional coyote will find it and smell of it. And within its hearing, had the skeleton ears to hear with, the familiar and dreaded song of the coyotes will yet be heard for a long, long time.

THE WILD HORSE

CHAPTER ONE

THE STALLION AND "CIRCUS JOHN"

ON the plains of Wyoming not many years ago there still remained small bands of horses which had escaped capture and the branding-iron.

The district was at that time but sparsely settled. The miles and miles of great irrigation ditches, which now change the dried up prairies into green fields, were still non-existent.

At that time there were no farms excepting along the rivers, where each farmer could dig his own irrigation canals; and the rivers big enough to hold water all summer were few and far between.

There still are, and always will be, great stretches of prairie untouched by plow or harrow; stretches which by reason of having no water are worthless even as pastures.

In the northern part of the state the plain is broken up into a series of hills, the foot-hills of the near and the more distant mountains standing out against the sky.

There are some big and some smaller patches of level land in among the hills, level plateaus bounded by nearly perpendicular walls. There are mounds like pyramids; between which the spring rains on the dry earth have carved out numberless

narrow and deep ravines that keep their tortuous course down to the lower levels.

On the whole it is a landscape than which none is better fitted for the beasts of the wild. Among the fantastically carved hills the wild animals find ideal shelter in their ceaseless fight with man.

The district is built on a large scale; there is nothing narrow and depressing. All is grand and free, from the smallest hillock to the snow-capped peaks which in spite of the great distance stand out so clear against the blue sky.

And the place is rich in animal life, herbivorous and carnivorous.

It is rich also in wild-fowl, but poor in song-birds.

It is rich in rodents and rattlesnakes, in summer sun and winter storms; and at all seasons it has a vast wealth of nature's solitude, disturbed only by the life of the wild, and on rare occasions by a lonely traveler or new settler.

Here it was that a herd of wild horses had their home quarters. Once they may have been many; but during these later years man had been diligently engaged in thinning their ranks. Now and then some of them were captured, until now there were only twenty-five or thirty left. These horses had no great money value. They were the common little ponies, too light for heavy work. They were not fit for anything but the saddle, and out here at that time saddle-horses were incredibly cheap; tho they were used by all men, all the time, and everywhere. Still the number of wild horses was steadily decreasing.

Sometimes the boys caught them merely for the fun of it; sometimes for use on special days, on which the boys competed for prizes to those most clever in riding horses that never had known the feel of leather on their back. And sometimes they were rounded up because some of them belonged to somebody. These animals, which ran wild nearly the whole year, might so easily join the herd and thus be lost.

These few horses on the strip of land between the river and the mountains were but a small remnant of the great bands once so numerous on the plains.

Gregarious animals always have a chief, a leader whom they trust and follow. Generally the leader is an animal which in some way has attracted attention, shown itself possessed of unusual courage. This band of horses had such a leader, a strongly built and finely set up light-brown stallion.

This stallion was no longer young; sheep-herders and other denizens of the prairie had seen him now and then for many years, and more than one of them had wished himself the owner of the fine animal.

In summer the wild horses generally kept to the plateaus near the mountain, but in winter they sometimes came down to the banks of the river.

"Circus-John" lives in a little cabin of round logs down by the river.

The cabin has but one room and stands at the center of his farm, which he some years ago took

as a homestead. The farm is not fit for cultivation. But it is bordered by a creek, which runs dry in the summer; while not far from the cabin nature had hollowed out some big basins. At the time of the spring freshets these are filled with water, and there is enough of it for the sheep and cattle all summer.

This is the only water-hole within a circuit of many miles; and its owner, Circus John aforesaid, thus controls the whole prairie in these parts.

It has, probably, never entered the mind of Circus John that he might earn his bread by cultivating the soil; for in spite of his great size and strength there is nothing which he hates like hard work. His place is only four or five miles from a little inland town, one not on a railroad. And at this time and in this district four or five miles count for nothing.

When John must work for others he finds something not too strenuous, preferably riding or driving. On his own place he does only the work absolutely necessary. He prepares his meals, goes sometimes out pot-hunting, reads much, and sleeps more.

In the winter he may once in a while shoot some beast of prey which happens to come too near for comfort.

From time to time he has appropriated to himself a few ponies. These run wild on the prairie; but when the creek dries up they also come to the water-hole by the cabin.

When herding sheep John had often seen the

THE STALLION COMES FIRST, GALLOPING DOWN TOWARDS THE WATER

little band of wild horses, which had so far managed to escape capture. He has seen them close by. Once when he rode against the wind and had just topped a hill, he unexpectedly came right on them. He has seen them far away at the edge of one of the many little plateaus or on top of some ridge. He has seen them when they are in a panic and gallop madly with streaming mane across the plains.

And each time he has noticed their chief and leader, the stallion of the light brown color and the strong build.

He has often wished that he might add all these horses to his own band; mark their untouched haunches with his branding-iron. He wants to sit in his cabin and see them come at noon to the water-hole. But what he wants most of all is to have for his own that fine brown stallion, which when frightened seems fairly to fly over the prairie.

For some months in the winter John is a sheep-herder; keeping the sheep up under the mountains, where the wind sweeps the snow off the sparse fodder.

During these months he often sees the band of horses, sometimes near by, and sometimes at such a distance that he must use his telescope.

Early in spring he quits his job. He has now definitely decided that he will catch that stallion.

The new grass will not be eatable before some time in May; so he has time enough to make his

plans. All winter the animals have been on slender rations, and are now lean and hungry.

There are many ways of capturing wild horses. A number of men with enough horses so that they can have a fresh mount when necessary, may chase the wild horses till these can run no farther. Or the band may be followed more leisurely, but persistently, so that they have no chance to eat or drink or rest; and when this has been kept up long enough—it may be for several days—they are tired out and will refuse to go on. Then the men ride forward on fresh horses, and either lasso the wild ones or drive them into some enclosure.

These methods, however, undoubtedly the best and most effective on a level plain over which one may ride safely even on a dark night, have often proven unsatisfactory on ground as hilly and rough as that chosen by this particular band for their stamping ground. And, moreover, these methods will not do in the present case, as they require a number of men; while John is all alone.

The first thing which John does after reaching home, while trying to think out some way of capturing that stallion, is to round up his own ponies in the corral.

Next day he drives to town for provisions and several sacks of oats.

He has not decided just how he is going to catch the stallion; but at any rate he wants to have his own ponies in good condition when he goes about it. A horse fed on oats has much greater endur-

ance than one that has been fed on grass only. Day and night John's thoughts are busy with this matter. Countless plans are weighed and discarded. They always have some flaw when he considers them in all their practical details.

CHAPTER TWO

IN THE PITFALL

ONE day John fell in with the band of horses far up among the hills, near a small pond which was their regular drinking place. They came down from the hills on a slow trot, Indian file, following the narrow path which their own hoofs had worn; and the brown stallion is in the lead.

John dismounts and lies down to look at them at his leisure thru his binoculars. The horses do not seem to fear any danger; they trot right down to the water. Nobody has troubled them during the winter, and so they have grown to be careless and feel safe.

John lies there a long time looking thru the glasses. The horses are at ease. They walk out into the pond till the water reaches their knees; drink, lift the head and look lazily about them, and then drink some more.

On the other side of the pond a herd of cows comes down the gentle slope.

When the last of the horses disappears behind the hills John mounts his nag and rides home. While he had been lying out there looking at the horses, his plan of action had popped into his head.

His new idea puts him in good humor; he rejoices over the beauty of nature, but especially over

his own bright idea. A rabbit jumps out of the grass before the feet of his horse and scampers away like mad. Far away in the bright sunshine a herd of antelopes is feeding.

Two days later John comes driving back to the pond. In the wagon he has his cooking utensils, provisions, sleeping blankets, and several other things. He stops behind a hill near the path of the horses, unhitches his own animal and ties it to the wagon and gives it a feed of oats.

It is getting on toward evening; and there are almost no signs of life stirring in the light of the setting sun.

Having eaten nothing since morning, John sets about the work of getting supper. His oven is three round stones, on which he places the frying pan with some slices of pork and fried potatoes. At the side of it he plants his coffee-pot down among the live coals. He arranges his table-ware on top of the box in which he has his provisions. In a few moments the still air is delighted with the aroma of fried pork and strong coffee. His sleeping-blankets are covered with canvas as a protection against moisture and dust. John has some old newspapers with him; and now he stretches himself on the piece of canvas with the saddle under his head and begins to read. He remains lying there till twilight settles down over the water and the prairie.

Out of the darkness comes the melancholy hoot of an owl, and is answered by the peculiar, long-drawn and many-toned cry of a coyote.

At early dawn John is up, and again there is

the smell of coffee and fried pork. Just as he has finished washing up his dishes the sun appears over the mountains far away to the east. He takes a spade and a pick out of the wagon and makes his way to the path of the horses.

John knows that they will follow this their old path when they come down to drink; and he is pretty sure that the stallion will lead the procession.

He finds a place at which the horses must turn sharply around a boulder. There he digs a big hole, a pitfall, which he then carefully covers with the branches of trees and with earth. Then he goes back to his wagon.

When the afternoon sun tells him that it is near the time for the horses to come down to their drinking-place, he saddles one of his own horses and rides away, leading the other animal. He rides a quarter of a mile or so; far enough away so that his horses and the others will not smell one another; and still near enough to let him keep an eye on whatever is doing.

The landscape, already being clothed in its mantle of green, is spread out around him in picturesque irregularity, under a cloudless sky with a sun whose warmth can now be felt.

The pond is like a bright eye in which the surrounding hills are clearly reflected.

Here and there on the surface of the water is seen a ripple caused by a trout coming up into the light. But apart from this there is no life, no sound.

John has been sitting here many times before this,

especially when herding sheep. But the time has never before seemed to move so slowly, as he never before has been waiting so eagerly for something to happen.

He no longer sits looking about him; he has no eye for the grandeur of nature. The longer he waits the more sharply are his eyes fixed on the edge of the hill where he had seen the horses disappear, and where he may expect at any moment to see them come back; the stallion in the lead, big and clearly outlined against the sky.

At last they come. With the glasses held tight to his face Circus John sits there and enjoys the sight of them. As he had expected, the stallion comes first, the others filing after him till the whole band has rounded the hill and is trotting down toward the water.

John sees it all clearly, noting especially and with increased admiration the supple form of the leader, with the long, flowing tail and mane. In imagination he already sits on the back of the stallion, now confidently trotting down the path with no thought of fear or danger. For the peace of the winter has given the horses a feeling of security. John is so lost in admiration of the animal that he forgets all else, till he sees the horses near the boulder marking the place of the pitfall. He is on tenterhooks. The moment is at hand. He has difficulty in holding fast the glasses. The head and then the whole body of the stallion is out of sight behind the boulder, and the animal has shown no sign of suspicion that anything is wrong.

Then John sees the horse which followed nearest the heels of the leader suddenly stop and turn back. The others do likewise, and there is great confusion, soon almost hid by a thick cloud of dust. In a moment John is in the saddle; and frightened by the unexpected and painful digging of the spurs into its sides, the horse goes as one of sense bereft over the broken ground. The animals which had followed the stallion have during these seconds been surprised out of their wits. Now they see John and gallop madly away, till nothing is seen of them but a cloud of dust. In the pitfall lies the stallion, a prisoner for the first time in its life. It has gained its feet and tries to get out, but the pitfall is too deep. At the sight of the man the animal becomes desperate. Again and again, times without number, it tries to get out, but all its efforts are vain.

John sits himself on the boulder and looks at the stallion. His heart is touched by the animal's fight for liberty; he feels sympathy with the prisoner now deserted by its whole band of followers.

Still he remains sitting there; he can not leave the horse in the pitfall. The sun sets, and twilight comes upon them, but still he sits on the boulder, and still the horse continues its hopeless struggle. Not before the twilight has turned into black night does he go to the wagon to prepare his evening meal. And not till then does the captured, wild horse desist from its efforts to get out of the pitfall.

CHAPTER THREE

CAN IT BE TAMED?

ON a day of bright sunshine in May, a week later, John stands looking with pride and joy at the captured stallion. It has been a hard and slow job to get the animal safely home; the stallion fighting all the time for liberty. During the first days after its capture it will allow nobody to come near. It tugs at the ropes with which it is tied; kicks up its hind feet and strikes with its front feet, till the stable seems about to tumble down. For three days the stallion had refused to taste of anything but water.

It is the finest animal which John ever has seen. He goes into the stable to look at it at least twenty times a day; and often in the night also, especially when the horse is unruly. He never tires of admiring it. He rejoices like a child in expectation of the day on which the stallion shall at last be tamed; and he shall ride it into town, with the eyes of all men following it in wonder and admiration.

These last three days the animal has quieted down somewhat. It has begun to eat; and it is not absolutely wild whenever John comes into the stable. It seems in a way to have given up the struggle. It seems to have seen the folly of keeping up the fight, and to say: "You have me; I surrender."

This animal is not so nervous as horses generally are in the beginning of their imprisonment. It does not cower and tremble, not even at the touch of the whip. John regards this as evidence that the animal will prove a very apt pupil.

In the stable he puts his brand on its haunches. So now it has been marked on its fine skin as the property of man. Never again will it be wild and free.

Then comes the day on which John takes it out for the first time to teach it the rudiments of the art of carrying a man on its back. There is a strong rope around its neck and thru the rings of the halter, to which the rope is made fast with a hard knot. The rope is fifty feet long, and thus easily caught if anything should go wrong. Outside of the stable stands a pony that is trained to plant its feet firmly into the soil, and to win a tug of war against either cow or horse. John knows that he can trust the pony as long as the ropes and straps hold. And they will hold; they have been carefully tested and examined.

The stallion offers no resistance when John leads it out. John wonders at this. Can it be that the spirit of the stallion has already been broken?

This time, however, John is mistaken; his joy is premature. The stallion came quietly out of the door as if in all its life it had done nothing else. But as soon as the feel of spring and sunshine is in its face the situation is changed.

The suggestion of liberty in the fresh air, and the sight of the plains and distant hills, seem to stir

certain memories. These are its own hills; among them is home, and it is going back to it.

As soon as this instinct comes upon the horse the mighty muscles act in obedience to it. The beautiful and wise animal can remember things, tho it may not be able to think in the sense in which a man is said to think. The horse can not calculate results in advance. It acts on instinct only, and in this case with mad violence. The result is that the cruel rope is drawn taut, and the stallion thrown heavily to the ground.

Instantly it is on its feet again; and begins to trot back and forth with the rope held taut between it and the pony, which latter animal is almost sitting down with forefeet planted into the soil, and holds the stallion fast. Soon the stallion sees the uselessness of its manoeuver. It stops, and stands still on stiff legs, with head turned toward the man and pony.

John comes toward the horse with one hand on the rope, while in the other he has a lasso. He moves slowly and with extreme caution. He feels how the strain of the rope increases, how it quivers in his hand, more and more the nearer he comes. When the man is twenty feet away the horse makes a mighty spring to one side. It is afraid of the man; of this little thing, which has no fear, and which comes steadily nearer—this creeping thing which it could destroy with one blow of its hoof—tho this thing has captured it, out there on the prairie, where it was in its own proper element.

John continues to go nearer; slowly, cautiously,

but with no wavering in his purpose. But the horse, expecting no good to come of it, does not desire any nearer acquaintance. And to make its objection known, it indulges in many leaps and bounds, with the agility of an acrobat, threatening to break the rope; thus causing John to retreat. Not to admit defeat. A plainsman may have trouble in subduing a wild horse, but he does not allow the difficulty to conquer him. There are many ways of taming horses; and if this animal proves insensible to kindness, it will have to be subdued by brute force.

John throws his lasso on the ground in a way to form a loop at the place where the stallion's forefeet have been planted. Then he goes to one side, hoping that the horse may step into the loop. The horse again tries to get away from this persistent persecution; and the next moment it stands with both forefeet in the loop. A sudden jerk pulls the feet together. The startled animal tries hard to keep from falling; but its hoofs are tied close together, and it staggers, loses its balance and falls, and soon thereafter it lies on the ground, securely bound and helpless.

Then the hated man comes and ties something over its eyes, shutting out the light. But the big, strong animal lies there utterly powerless, trembling with fear and fury; while the man pats its neck and talks to it, and even sits down on its back.

After a time the rope is loosened. The horse finds its feet free and is up with a bound, but makes no move to run away. It remains standing there as

tho paralyzed, trembling with dread of that which is so strange and terrifying. Its limbs are free, and it stands erect and feels solid ground under its feet. But it holds them wide of each other and does not dare to move for fear of falling; for it is blindfolded and can see nothing.

With quiet confidence John now goes over to the horse, with the saddle in his hand. He talks to the animal and tries as far as possible to quiet its fears.

It remains standing as tho it had taken root; and when John keeps on talking to it in friendly tones and lays his hand on it, the skin quivers at the place where he touches it; and the horse shrinks from the touch, but does not move its feet. And the hand continues to rest on the same spot, no matter how much the skin quivers. The hand merely presses down a little harder, and then gently strokes the skin until the horse is used to it and pays no further attention. While John strokes and pats it and thus gets it to fix its alleged mind on this one thing, he carefully lifts the saddle and places it softly on the back of the animal. The horse has never had anything on its back; so now it is nervous again, trembles, utters a smothered whinny, and bends its back and squirms in an effort to be rid of its burden.

Thus it stands pulling back on stiff forelegs till its belly almost touches the ground, while the man straps the saddle in place.

He straps it tight; and every time that he tightens it another hole the horse groans; not in pain,

but in fear, and without moving the feet an inch from their place.

Circus John has broken more than one horse in the course of these years in Wyoming; but either in an enclosure, or with someone to help him if they were out on the open plain. Not that he is afraid of being thrown, as has frequently happened. When he decides not to try to ride the stallion today, the reason is that there might be danger of his losing the animal. He has sat many horses; but he realizes that he is not one of the great masters of the art. He knows also that this horse will buck like the very mischief. And his conviction is strengthened when he now takes off the bandage with which the horse had been blindfolded. As soon as the horse is able to see again it begins to buck, shooting into the air with back bent into the arc of a circle and the head down between the forelegs, which are stiff as sticks whenever they touch the ground. As an exhibition of bucking, John has never seen anything to equal it; such incredible quickness and such jumps. He has never seen a horse come down with back so curved and with hindquarters so high.

He is glad that he had not been so foolish as to try to ride it.

It keeps up the violent exercise for several minutes. A horse can seldom keep it up longer.

It is necessary to throw the stallion again before the saddle can be taken off.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FOURTH OF JULY

OF all the stubborn beasts John ever had to do with, this stallion is the worst. It long remains just what it was when he first tried to saddle it; just as unmanageable and just as untamed. In the stable it is like another creature. It may stand there for hours as quiet as a worn-out work-horse, looking thru the little open window toward the hills, a nameless longing in the deep eyes.

Every day for more than a month John has brought the horse out. And each time the old story has been repeated: The stallion simply will not be tamed. John has seen the methods used in training trick horses. He tries them on the stallion, as far as his humane heart will permit; but the result is nil.

One Saturday in town he meets many acquaintances, and all of them know something of the stallion. Many have seen it several times; and those who have not seen it are familiar with its history.

It is now late in June. The dry season has begun. From morning till night, day after day, the sun glows from a cloudless sky.

At John's invitation some of the men come out to his place on Sunday morning. Among them are some who whenever occasion offers compete for

the prizes given to the best riders; men whose boast it is that they can ride any animal with hair on it. John knows that one of the men at least is a rider whom no horse has been able to throw.

The stallion is led out, examined, and admired. The men decide to take it over to the nearest corral and there give it the first lesson. There are many who are willing to ride it. The horse is thrown, and is then blind-folded and saddled. It shrinks from it and sags in the back when the saddle is put in place; but still there has been some improvement in its behavior. It has learnt to wait till the bandage is removed from the eyes.

As it now for the first time feels the weight of a man on its back it sags so low that his feet almost reach the ground.

"Let go," shouts one of them. But the rider takes his time, settles himself in the saddle, and looks to make sure that the spurs are fastened as they should be. Then he quietly puts out his hand and draws the bandage away from the eyes of the horse.

The next moment the beast bounds high up, and comes down in a way to shake the earth; then up and down again and again on the same spot, at the rate of a jump every second.

After the tenth jump the rider is lying on his face in the dust twenty feet away. The stallion stands still as tho frightened at what it had done, and makes no attempt to be rid of the saddle. Or it may have forgotten the saddle on getting rid of the rider. When this man gets to his feet again

he is greeted by the others with derisive laughter.

One of these others, who prides himself on his skill, is thrown in less than five seconds. A third young man then tries it; and he, like the others, is a fellow who can ride almost anything. But the stallion, which has muscles of iron from having lived its life in the open and from having so long escaped capture, is a little too much for them.

From time to time there are many good riders who try to keep their seat on the back of this stallion, but none can do it. And so, naturally enough, the animal acquires a certain fame. Bets are made that this or that rider can stay on its back; and there is hardly any Sunday on which somebody does not come out to try his luck.

Williams is one of the men who saw the stallion that first Sunday in the corral; Williams, who never has been thrown.

He had not wanted to put his skill to test that day; for the stallion had already thrown three men. "It would not be fair," says he; "I will ride him some day when he is fresh and fit."

He kept his promise. That is to say, he came again, and he staid on the back of the stallion longer than any other had done—a whole minute.

"It can not be done; nobody can do it," he cries with tears in his voice, while brushing the dust off his clothes. "Nobody can ride that infernal beast."

And he really seems to be right. "If Williams can not stay on," the others say, "there are not many who can. If he can't ride it, the thing is impossible."

This, of course, made the stallion still more famous.

On the Fourth of July a number of riders are to compete for prizes in a town some twenty-five miles down the river. On such occasions the people come together from all the country round about; some men merely as spectators, and others as active competitors for the prizes.

The committee in charge writes to John, inviting him to be on hand with his famous stallion. There will be many riders, and the management wants to have horses that will try their mettle and please the crowd. There are many horses that can give a fair exhibition of bucking, but none has been able to throw every rider; and so a new animal which nobody can ride will be a great attraction.

The Fourth was a clear and scorchingly hot day. In the afternoon the festivities begin. There is but a mild interest in the rest of the program; people have come to see feats of skill in riding the untamed horses. There are many of these, and many riders. One by one the animals are brought out; and some riders are thrown, while others succeed in keeping their seats.

There are certain rules obtaining in this sport. The competing riders must not use an ordinary bridle, which would interfere with the free movements of the horse. They use something called a "hackamore," a sort of cross between a bridle and a halter, without any bit. And they are not allowed to hold on to the saddle with their hands.

The untamed stallion is the last on the list. The

spectators applaud when it is led out into the open. A member of the committee makes a complimentary speech, reciting the history of the animal, and ends by promising a special grand prize to the rider who can stay on its back.

Many of them know the beast and will have nothing to do with it. Others have heard of the abortive attempts made by many clever riders, and merely look at the horse with profound respect.

At first it seems as if nobody has the courage to put his skill to the test. Then a businessman of the town gets up and offers a substantial cash prize to the winner.

A dark-skinned Mexican dismounts and offers to try it.

The horse has been saddled so often that it no longer is necessary to throw it in order to put the saddle on. Sometimes the beast will even stand still while it is being done; generally, however, its eyes have to be bandaged. This time it makes no move while the Mexican puts the saddle on its back; but the moment that the man puts his foot in the stirrup the horse makes a violent bound. And now begins the hardest struggle in which man or horse ever has engaged. Usually the horse has been able to shake off its burden in three to six jumps. This time it makes a dozen or more jumps; and the Mexican still keeps in the saddle, and seems fully determined to stay there. At this unexpected sight the spectators shout encouragement to him and are fairly wild with enthusiasm. "Don't give up. Now you have him where you want him. He will soon

be all in." Thus a minute goes by, the enthusiasm reaching every moment a higher pitch. The uproar in such that the hoof-beats of the horse become inaudible.

But while the shouts give encouragement to the rider they also help to put the horse on its mettle. After another minute, when all expect to see the horse show signs of weakening, the beast still seems to have its spirit unbroken, and to have more fight in it than it had to begin with.

Then the uproar ceases. People are too much excited to shout. There is no sound but the striking of the hoofs against the hard ground; even the other horses seem to be interested.

Blood is seen to spurt from the mouth and nose of the rider. It is noticed that he becomes more pale under the dark skin, and that he reels in the saddle; and in another moment he lies in the dust, motionless and unconscious.

He had staid in the saddle longer than any other had done, but even for him the horse had too great strength and endurance. This test settles the matter; nobody can ride that horse.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUT DRIVING

IT is plain, then, that the stallion is not destined to be a saddle horse.

The brute is an "outlaw"—which out here among the horsemen means a horse that can not be tamed—say the men who are wise to the matter; and John knows in his soul that they are in the right.

"You may as well turn him loose again," they say, "for some fine day he will run away whether or no." John knows that they are right in this also. Yet he is not minded to let the stallion go. Between him and it there is a sort of hostile friendship. The horse allows him to pat it, something which no other man can do without causing the horse to show resentment. Once or twice the brute has even whinnied in a friendly way to John when he brought food or water.

As a true lover of animals, John can not help admiring the stubborn refusal of the beast to obey any man; its strong objection to being made a slave. He can only respect it the more for having thwarted all his hopes of it.

Besides, he has been thinking of trying another plan.

John is big and heavy and naturally lazy. To ride tires him; so when the roads permit it he

prefers to drive. At an auction he once bought a light little single-seated buggy; and now in his mind's eye he sees the fine and fleet-footed stallion between the thills. It may be as impossible to break the horse to harness as to the saddle; but one morning John ventures to try it nevertheless.

There are many ways of breaking a horse to harness. John chooses the easiest way; which is also the most common out in this country, in which horses are cheap. Among other property he owns a heavy lumber-wagon. To this wagon he one morning hitches the largest of his ponies. This old and reliable animal is to be one of the team and help to break in the stallion to pull in double harness.

When harnessed for the first time the stallion shows no fear; offers no resistance, but merely some mild curiosity. On the fetlock of the right forefoot has been fastened a strong leathern strap with an iron ring. Around the body is another strap with a similar iron ring on the under side, by the belly-band. From the wagon seat a rope goes down thru this ring to the one at the fetlock.

The stallion is hitched up without difficulty; but when John has settled himself in his seat, it is no longer such smooth sailing.

The stallion has been saddled so often that it was not now afraid of the straps buckled around its body. But when it makes a little jump and feels that these straps are holding it fast, it at once loses control of itself and begins to rear and tear, as it had done before when it wished to be rid of some encumbrance.

But the harness hampers its movements more effectively than could be done by a saddle with a man in it. Now the animal can not stir without being pulled back by something, and the bridle even prevents it from getting the head down between the legs. The other horse tries to go right on as usual, paying no attention to the stallion; which is frightened by the oncoming wagon and by its vain efforts to get loose, and so begins to toss his head and start off on a run.

As long as it keeps to the road everything is fairly satisfactory, even tho a little rough; but when the beast time and again is determined to shape its course across the broken prairie, John finds that it is time to give it a lesson.

He sets the brake as hard as he can, calls to the pony to stop, and pulls at the lines with all his strength. With the right hand he grasps the rope and pulls the foot of the stallion up against the belly; and the animal falls—falls hard. In a few moments it is up again and starts off on the jump with the brakes set on the heavy wagon, and towing the unwilling pony.

John lets the brute run for a time, while he tugs at the lines the sooner to tire it out. In spite of everything the stallion fights as stubbornly as it did under the saddle. In this way they travel a mile or more.

In its fear of all these strange experiences and in its desire to be free, the horse forgets everything else. It is covered with sweat, and the straps of the harness are bordered with foam. It breathes

hard and moans and groans. But there is no sign of its being tired or intending to slow up.

After two miles, when the stallion is flecked with foam, but is still going as strong as ever, John thinks it time to give it another lesson. He would rather not; but the horse leaves him no choice. He must resort to the cruel method of the circus. The horse is too old and has been running wild too long to be brought under subjection by kindness. It plainly never will be a saddle-horse; but it shall be broken to harness, or he is not the man called Circus John. He has captured it, and he will by some means tame it into some sort of usefulness.

Besides, he has been thinking that it is time to return home. Two miles each way is far enough for the first drive. But to turn around he must first stop; and to do this he must throw the horse.

So he pulls at the rope and at the same time shouts "Whoa" to the pony. This obedient animal settles back against the breech, and the stallion again is jerked off its feet and goes down in a cloud of dust.

This time the brute is in no hurry as before to get up. It lies there for a time, breathing noisily, while the dust coats its wet hide. When the horse gets to its feet it has quieted down to some extent. That last fall took some of the spunk out of the brute.

With some trouble John turns his team around, releases the brake and trots them home. Every day the horse is now harnessed and driven. The rope is soon taken off; the stallion no longer tries to run

away. It shows some surprise when hitched to the buggy for the first time, but soon accustoms itself to this also.

John has actually been able to break the stallion to harness; but if he comes with the saddle the brute is and remains untamable.

CHAPTER SIX

A RACE WITH DEATH

IT is especially in the fall, when the heavy gray clouds hang low in the heavens, that the lonely plains are seen in their most terrifying loneliness.

The skies may be lowering for days at a time; sun, moon and stars have been blotted out, the mountains have been removed, sad and gray are the prairies and all life.

It is at such times that the lone settler longs sorely for companionship. Mayhap there comes to him with painful clearness the memory of brighter hours far, far away from the cruel monotony and horrible loneliness of the plains.

None suffered more from this weather than did John. He is by nature sensitive; the weather means much to him. He is always in good humor when the sun shines, and depressed when the grayness of autumn is on the land. On such days he likes best to stay in the house with his books. But there are days which no book can brighten—days so somber that he can not keep his mind on that which he is reading. So he often sits for hours looking disconsolately out of the window at the gray sky. Once in a while he slings his gun over his shoulder and goes out, and tramps over the prairie with no goal, no definite purpose; walks merely to forget

himself in aimless wandering, or to escape from his feeling of hopeless depression. Just why he takes the gun with him he neither knows nor cares. When in this state of mind he never shoots anything—he simply can't take heart to do it—not even if a wolf or a coyote presents a good target.

In his want of companionship he many times a day goes out to the stable; where stands the stallion, as lonely as the man himself. All nature seems dead; whereas the horse is alive if nothing else. So it becomes John's one and only refuge in his loneliness.

The stallion, too, seems to feel the influence of the weather. It pays no attention when John pats it and talks to it. It stands still and stares thru the dirty window out over the prairie, and its heavy breathing is a moan of distress.

In this moan there is something like a complaint; and John's good sense often has a hard time of it, fighting down an impulse to set the horse free.

There still are some bright days with a clear sky; wonderful, belated fragments of the summer.

When no wind is blowing, these days may be quite warm down on the low lands; while the mountains, during the time in which they were hidden by clouds, have become white with snow.

*

On a bright day just before Christmas John brings out his buggy, hitches up the stallion and starts for town. He needs a number of things for his house-keeping; for which reason he drives to a larger city some twenty miles away. It is a fine

morning; the sun just appearing over the snow-covered mountains that stand out against the blue sky.

John is in the very best of spirits on this wonderful winter morning. He has never seen a more smiling day. On all sides, as far as the eye can reach, the prairie and the hills are as gold in the red sunshine, flecked here and there with white wherever there is a patch of snow protected by a clump of sagebrush.

There has been such a long spell of cloudy weather that all his senses are now intoxicated by the change. There is music in his soul. For the first time in weeks he is able to look on the bright side of life. His ears are rejoiced by the sound of the hoofs against the frozen trail. There is music everywhere; in the creaking of the old wheels, in the scraping together of the rusty springs, in the stillness around him, the big and mysterious and infectious and dangerous stillness of the prairie. Without intending it, he finds himself humming an accompaniment to all these sounds. After being dammed up so long, his spirits must have an outlet. He catches himself in the act of singing out loud, and then suddenly stops. He must not disturb this majestic peace by obtruding his own unimportant self.

The stallion keeps to the trail like an old veteran. It goes up the hills on a walk; but when over the top it breaks into a trot again of its own accord. And thus it goes up hill and down, hour after hour; and the stallion does not turn a hair, and its breath

comes but little faster than when it is standing in its stall.

In the early afternoon they reach the town, where they stay two days. There is nothing to be seen which John has not seen already; but it does him good to see and to talk with others of the human kind. He has been alone so long that he has almost forgotten what they are like.

He spends the two days in talking, playing cards, and in treating and being treated to liquid refreshment.

Many times a day he goes to the barn to make sure that his horse is comfortable. He has a room in the town's one hotel. Toward noon on the third day he starts for home.

The morning had been clear; but later on the sun is hid now and then behind a cloud, sailing slowly southward before the wind. By noon the sun is no more to be seen. The bright morning has in a few hours been changed into a dark winter day.

The wind frequently shifts its direction, and is growing much stronger; and it begins to sing a long, sad song. John is lost in thought. He does not notice the rising wind, nor feel that the cold is becoming more sharp. He does not hear the creaking of the buggy, nor the hoof-beats on the road. That which some days ago was music in his ears now means nothing to him. When his mind comes back from its wool-gathering the day has become alarmingly dark. The cloudy heavens seem to close in on him from every side. Some big flakes of snow

ride by on the wind and disappear into the darkness.

Then John notices how the wind is whistling thru the heather. This music is worth hearing—an æolean harp with strings of prairie heather. The wind has never had a greater number of strings to play on, and had never played music in which there was a blending of so many different tones.

The wind increases in strength, and the snowflakes fall more thickly. They fall on the warm back of the horse and lie there a moment before they die. After a time it bothers John to keep the snow out of his eyes; the strong wind sweeps it straight into his face. Then he thinks of the fearful blizzards which sometimes come so suddenly down from the mountains.

At three in the afternoon it is nearly as dark as night. The whistling of the wind becomes more sharp. Soon it becomes a howling storm with clouds of drifting snow.

The snow now falls so thick that the warmth of the stallion's back can not melt it. A deep layer of it covers the animal from the eyes to the tail. Now John is sure that a blizzard, possibly one of the worst of its kind, will soon be upon him. The thought chills his blood. He knows these storms, which may come without warning and last for days.

In the meantime the wind continues to rise, and it now howls across the plain. And the snow is more cold and sharp and bites into his face. When it comes straight from the front he is compelled to shut his eyes. The road, which was merely two

faint wheel-tracks, has long since become invisible.

After another half hour the storm is a real blizzard. It is biting cold; and John dreads to think of what he has before him on his long way home.

He sits huddled down in the seat with only his eyes uncovered. And he might almost as well cover these also; for he can see nothing but the drifting snow.

The stallion trots as before, up hill and down dale, and is now entirely white with snow. The going is heavy, and the stallion sweats; and the drops of sweat at once turn into ice. John tries to shape his course on the assumption that the wind is blowing from the same direction as before;—a somewhat risky assumption, for the wind may have veered to another quarter.

He regrets that he had not taken one of the other horses; one on which he could depend. He can not know what this stallion may take it into its head to do when given a free rein. It may make for the mountains rather than for the stable. This is only a prison anyway.

The heavy clouds which almost turned day into night before the storm broke, have become somewhat less black. The snow, also, helps in some degree to dispel the darkness. After the lapse of a long hour or two of gloomy forebodings there comes the darkness, not of storm and snowclouds, but of night—a dismal and dangerous winter night.

The last light of day is gone, and he has not seen any of the familiar landmarks. By this time he should have reached home. His blood runs

cold as the conviction forces itself upon him that he has lost himself in these wilds.

He continues as before to drive pretty straight against the wind, the stallion fighting its way between the mounds of snow. However, the wind may have made a half-turn without giving any notice of it to our friend John.

He has noticed several times that when the horse has a free rein it turns toward the right. He knows that animals are far superior to man in their sense of direction, and that they generally manage to find their way; but he is not quite sure of this stallion. The brute may have private reasons for going wrong. Besides, many horses have a decided objection to going straight in the face of a blizzard.

While John sits thinking of this there is the howl of a coyote near by, and it makes him shiver. Such a howl has never before seemed so dismal. It seems to affect the horse in the same way. On hearing its wail thru the night the stallion plunges violently forward.

John happens to think of stories about people lost on the prairies in a blizzard. Only last winter a herder disappeared from his home near John's cabin. He had been surprised by a blizzard and had sought shelter in a ravine; in which he had, no doubt, frozen to death. His body was found some days later; not his body exactly, but what was left of it. His bones had been picked clean by the coyotes, that had presumably kept themselves near, waiting for him to die.

The coyotes have a habit of doing this in winter-

time when food is scarce. They will wait for days to see a famished cow lie down and die. John wonders if any of the brutes are following him now in order to be at hand in the event that something happens.

The ground is more uneven than it was. The horse often slows up to walk over the worst places. John is in danger of being thrown out when the wheels sink down into the deepest holes. The springs of the buggy seem hardly able to stand the strain.

John's thoughts take a new turn. Suppose that some accident should happen to the buggy? It is old and rickety. What will become of him if....? Before he has reached the end of this thought there is the howl of the wolf heard above the storm. The horse is startled and sets off on a canter which threatens at any moment to overturn and wreck the buggy.

It is all that John can do to keep his seat, and at the same time keep his hold on the reins. The buggy creaks in every joint as it is thrown from side to side when bumping over the hummocks.

Then something breaks; and before he has time to think of it—he is in the snow, being dragged thru and over the drifts. He can see nothing. The snow has closed his eyes and choked up his nose and mouth. Some remnants of the buggy still are in evidence; while he instinctively keeps his hold on the reins.

Strangely enough, the horse soon slows up. John

tries to rise, but can not. He has sprained his right ankle.

So has happened that which he feared most of all. He has lost himself in a blizzard on the plains at night, with a useless foot and a horse which nobody can ride.

The first thing that he does is to fasten the reins around his body. Then he crawls over to the horse. By leaning against it and pulling himself up by the harness he succeeds in getting to his feet; tho on the right one he can not stand. With much trouble he frees the horse from the wreckage of the buggy. Just then a wolf howls again near by, and a coyote answers from a distance.

Both John and the horse look behind them, and see two dark forms following like shadows in their tracks. Are they after him? He has a revolver, but dares not use it for fear of frightening the horse.

The wolves keep close to him. They do not howl; and they sneak close to him with noiseless feet. The horse wants to get away; and John requires all his strength and weight to hold it.

The wolves become more inquisitive, and at last their impudence is intolerable. John draws his revolver and sends a ball right between the luminous eyes of the nearest beast. The horse again makes a break to get away, but is held tight.

The situation seems desperate. The storm does not relent, but shrieks weirdly thru the night.

The horse is John's only hope. If he tries to ride and is thrown he will be done for. Is this to

be the end? Is his flesh to be eaten by these beasts, his bones to be picked and scattered for miles perhaps over the prairie?

His sprained ankle pains him more and more. He is tired—deadly tired. His mind runs on the homely comforts of his poor cabin, with a crackling fire and the smell of fried pork in the evening air. Had he been there now he would, as so often before, have thrown himself down on the bed while the food was cooking. To lie there with closed eyes, enjoying the smell of strong coffee, hearing the coyotes howl in the storm outside, to feel the blessed heat of a roaring fire on the hearth;—all this now seems to him the very highest summit of well-being. A dream, probably, which he does not expect ever to dream again.

How good it would be to sit down and rest for a time. But then he remembers the herder of last winter, who must have felt the same way, and had then sat down and fallen asleep for good and all, and the coyotes had picked his bones clean.

John comes back to the world of reality on hearing the horse draw a sharp breath and snort noisily at the smell of something of which it is afraid. He turns his head in the same direction as the horse, and sees four or five dark forms sneaking close to them—bloodthirsty, noiseless as shadows.

Then John determines to try the impossible: to ride the horse which nobody can ride. It is his last chance. If they remain standing here, both he and the horse will freeze to death. Besides, he will soon no longer be able to hold the horse; it will

surely get away from him when the wolf comes nearer. So he takes a strong hold of the hames and hoists himself up, expecting every moment that the stallion will bound away from under him. Never in his life—at any rate, never since he became a man—has he been so near to offering up a prayer. In his heart he promises the horse its liberty if it does not now throw him.

With much trouble he has at last climbed to the stallion's back. To his great surprise and delight the horse stands still while he settles himself in position; then it begins to walk and shortly thereafter breaks into a trot, and then into a hard gallop across the prairie; and John is whirled away in a cloud of snow. The stallion makes no attempt whatever to throw him.

Strange as it may seem, John has no time to think of these things; he is fully employed in keeping his seat. He holds on to the hames, so that his hands ache in their mittens; while the stallion gallops with reckless abandon thru the blinding snow and over the dangerous ground.

After an hour or so it strikes John that he is on familiar soil. These hills and valleys seem old friends. The narrow bed of a dry creek makes his heart to leap within him. Still he would best not rejoice too soon; he must first make sure that there is no mistake. For he feels these hills and ravines rather than sees them. It is not till the horse stops before the door of the stable that he dares to rejoice in the certainty of being saved. He leads the horse into the stall, rubs it well down with a wisp

of hay, covers it with two heavy blankets, gives it drink and fodder, and beds it down with a big armful of straw. Not till then does he leave it and hobble into the cabin to take some care of himself.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A PROMISE REDEEMED

THE storm lasted three days. During these days John gives the best of care to the horse that had saved his life. He gladly goes to any amount of trouble to make the horse comfortable, and nothing which he has of food is too good for it.

As it stands in the stable dry and warm, while the storm howls and the snow sweeps past the little window, the horse seems to appreciate all this care devoted to it.

On the fourth day the sun was again on duty. A wonderful, glorious day! As far as the eye can reach the rolling plain is covered with a shining mantle of snow, now glittering in many colors. At intervals an aspiring sagebrush lifts its head and stands sedate and solemn as a sentinel looking out over the field of snow. And over in the distant whiteness is the giant face of the mountain ridge; across which there runs a black band: the belt of forest, which is the only dark thing in the midst of all this whiteness.

In spite of the glorious day the heart of John is heavy. He had promised himself to set the stallion free; and today he must redeem this promise.

With all its faults John has come to love this horse. And now that he must part with it, he loves

it all the more. Is there no way out of it? No; he must not lead himself into temptation. He must keep his promise.

So with heavy heart he goes to the stable to give the horse its last feed. The horse also is excited; it has felt the change in the weather. When he now turns it loose, free of rope and halter, it will never come back.

He goes into the cabin and prepares his breakfast. But he can not eat; nothing tastes exactly right.

Towards noon he goes out to the stable to fulfil his promise. The stallion is pulling at the halter, trying to get loose.

John goes over and pats the animal, fondly and long, before he unties the rope. In the door he stops to take the halter off. He looks into the beautiful eyes, and fondly rubs its cheek against his own. He pats it, but can not talk; he is too near the verge of tears. At last he takes the halter off and lets it drop; and for the first time since its capture the horse is free of rope and strap, free as it once had been.

It walks some steps, nosing the snowdrifts, turns once or twice as if in search of the best place, and then lies down and rolls over several times. Then it gets up and shakes itself vigorously and goes slowly away, stopping now and then to smell the tufts of heather.

John stands there looking at it, and remains standing even long after it has disappeared behind the hills.

Then he goes in and sits himself down more lonesome than ever before. He has lost a good friend—his best friend.

But in the evening when he stands in the twilight preparing his supper, he has a great surprise. He hears a noise at the door of the stable and sees the horse, which wants to get in.

He hurries out and lets the animal into the stable, and gives it oats and hay and a blanket, and beds it down with clean straw.

Now begins a new life for the horse. It is never put to work. It is free, and goes and comes without let or hindrance. When the weather is bad it stays in the stable. And so the winter goes, and the spring is come.

John sees the springtime on the prairie, now turning green; and he hears it at night when the coyotes call to one another, singing the songs appropriate to this season of love.

The snow on the low lands has melted; only on the mountain sides it still lies glittering in the sun.

The stallion still leads its free life, going and coming with none to hinder. But as the air grows warmer, and the fine blades of grass begin to reach up thru the soil, and the days become long and bright, the horse feels the fever in its blood. It is lonesome; there is something wanting. And it makes longer and longer excursions into the wild. With increasing distress John notices that the horse no longer is so prompt in coming home at night.

First it is gone for two whole days, then for

AT LIBERTY AGAIN

three; and then at last one warm day it goes out in the morning—and never comes back.

Presumably it went back to its old stamping grounds, back to life and liberty; back to its harem among the mountains, the memory of which came back to the animal when the fever of springtime was in its blood.

BESS

WISER THAN MAN

BESS is a fine and kind and lazy dark-brown mare that I used to drive; with Julie, a superannuated and ugly and bony and capricious mule, as the other member of the team. My comrade Niland was the owner of both.

It was a winter of the period when we had a financial crisis. The hard times affect us also; and so we do not hesitate, when the opportunity offers, to go up into the mountains to cut timber on a contract with a lumber dealer in the nearest town.

It is in the middle of January. For several reasons we must travel as light as possible. Our whole outfit consists of a little tent, the necessary tools, cooking utensils, sleeping blankets, some books with which to while away the stormy days, and the provisions for ourselves and the team. On the way up to the camp the load was almost too heavy anyhow.

We started out one morning at earliest break of day; a cold and clear morning, with one bright star still twinkling in the sky, and the moon just going down. Niland is the cook, while I am the driver.

I have been away for some time, and have but now come back from the cities. How good it seems again to sit here with the lines in my hands, listening to the creaking wagon-wheels on the frozen road. How beautiful and still everything is in the

half-darkness and the snow of the woods bordering the river which we must cross. On the other side of the river are the first foothills, the secure foundation of the mountains.

It is gray dawn. The mountain towers before us, cold and white, the monotony of the snow-fields relieved here and there by a dark patch of forest. The wagon pulls hard. Bess and Julie breathe heavily and send clouds of steam up into the cold air; but they climb hill after hill without stopping to rest.

Once in a while a rabbit starts up and scampers away; or a coyote is heard to howl a welcome to the dawning day.

The sun rises majestically over the snowy ridge. It pours a bounteous flood of light on the forests, gilds the fields of snow, and gently caresses the bare plains.

By midday the air is pleasantly warm. Now the mountain stands out distinctly, bold and commanding. The many ravines with which the face of the mountain is scarred are clearly seen. It is to one of them that we are going. There are the cedars, and them we are to cut down.

In the middle of the afternoon we are there. The weather up among the mountains is somewhat uncertain. Just as we have put up our tent we notice two small black clouds coming up from the northwest.

As I have mentioned, Niland is the cook, and I take care of the team. We have found a sheltered

spot for our camp; but there is a disadvantage in that there is no water. Water is scarce here anyhow at this season of the year. For cooking we use snow. Usually there is a creek at the bottom of every ravine; but now all are dry, so that the only convenient watering place is a spring some three-quarters of a mile from our camp. It is my business to water the team while Niland prepares the supper.

We have no saddle with us; wherefore a look at Julie's sharp spine determines me to choose Bess as my riding-horse.

Down to the spring it is a rolling, broken country, sparsely covered with grass and coarse heather; with round cobble-stones on which the horses slip; with countless crooked ravines, in which there is water only when the snow is melting, or when it rains.

Gray clouds cover the whole sky toward the northwest when I set out for the watering place. The sun is just sinking beneath the horizon, and "all the air a solemn stillness holds."

There is something threatening in this stillness; something not easily explained. Something of crushing power seems to be in the air; I feel it very strongly as I ride down the trail. It is this peculiar feel of the air before a snow-storm, not exactly cold, but big with mysterious possibilities; so that I feel it as a chill down the spine. We make but slow progress. It goes up and down; and at many points, especially where the spring freshets have carved

deep ditches down the hillsides, we are compelled to make long detours.

Neither Bess nor Julie nor I have been here before. Niland had from the tent pointed out the direction. Near the spring a small tree stands alone in its glory; but the lay of the land is such that I see the tree only at intervals. It does not make much difference anyhow; when the animals are thirsty they will find water if there is any. I have put no bridles on them; only halters. The mare is afraid of the slippery stones and is very careful how she goes. So we do not get there as soon as I had expected.

The grayness in the northwest is spreading out over the heavens; it has nearly reached the zenith. I begin to take note of certain landmarks, in order to have something to go by should darkness overtake me on my way back to camp.

A gentle breeze stirs the stillness. It pulls half-heartedly at the heather and the dry grass, and then dies down. It is followed by strong gusts of wind, veering gradually from the northwest to the north, and the northeast, and they become a storm. This now sweeps with a dull sound over the hills, and becomes colder and colder. When we reach the spring, all the heavens are a somber gray.

The wind no longer comes in gusts, but blows steadily out of the north, bringing with it thru the waning light some fine particles of snow. Plainly the storm will soon be upon us.

So, as soon as the animals have slaked their thirst, I set out for the camp, which I can barely see thru

"BESS" FOLLOWS ME RELUCTANTLY

the thick haze. We now have the wind straight against us; and it is growing stronger, and the snow more blinding. In a few minutes all the landmarks have disappeared. I keep the horse with its head against the wind. The weather grows worse, the storm turning into a blizzard. I have never seen the air more thick with snow. It seems a solid wall before me, a moving wall of snow.

It took long to get down to the spring, and now our progress is slower still. I feel sure that we are going in the right direction; and therefore I am taken by surprise when Bess turns off to the left, so that we have the wind from the side. What can it mean? Of course I know that a horse can keep the right direction better than any man can do it; but I also know that animals object strongly to going straight against a storm.

I look for Julie, but the mule is not in sight.

When the wind is at its worst I have a hard time of it to keep my seat on the back of the mare. We come to one of the numerous and many-armed creek-beds; and I dismount and lead the animal. I think that she turned off to the left merely to avoid the snow driving right into her eyes. So when I now follow an arm of the ravine farther to the right, we should again be going toward the camp.

There is deep snow down in the ravine, and the drifts are growing; but we are well sheltered down there, and the storm goes over our heads.

We do not get on fast. My limbs are stiff with cold, and Bess follows me most unwillingly. At times she stops short and wants to turn around, but

comes on again when I pull at the rope and speak kindly to her. So we go on till I am warm. We reach the end of the ravine and must climb out of it and get back into the snowstorm. I again climb to the back of the mare.

By the aid of the halter and rope I try to hold the beast straight in the face of the wind, but Bess does not agree with me, and soon again begins to fall off from the course. Repeatedly I force her to take my way; and just as often she carries me her way, and then she goes much faster. When I direct her course she makes haste slowly; seems to think that it is a funeral procession. Had it not been for the stubborn disposition of the mare we should now have reached the camp according to my calculations, and I am beginning to lose patience. The limit is reached when she stops short up on a ridge and refuses to go on. My temper is ugly, but I dare not show it. Having no saddle and bridle, I am helpless to control the beast.

My temper gets the best of me anyhow, and I give her a kick in the side. She starts forward for some steps in the direction I want her to go, and then turns off in the direction which she herself wants to go.

I scold her and pull at the rope, which I have tied around my frozen wrist, in order to stop her.

My thighs seem to be dead from the hard work I have had to keep myself on the back of the mare. I am angry, and swear that I would force her to obey me, if I only had the saddle and bridle. As the case stands, I am compelled to temporize. So

I talk gently to her. My hands are numb with cold. I dismount, and warm them, putting them under her mane; and while patting her neck and nose I contrive to get the rope into her mouth; and a half turn around the jaw does the feat. Again I must walk for a time to whip up the circulation in my stiffened limbs. I make but slow progress, for Bess holds back. However, I am able to drag her after me; for that half turn of the rope pinches her the harder when she pulls against it. And so we go on for a time.

It is exasperating business to walk into the teeth of a snowstorm and pull a stubborn horse; and several times I am almost overcome by the desire to tan her hide. But I go no farther than to jerk hard at the rope; which merely makes the situation worse. She stops and lifts her head and begins to walk backward.

How long we kept this up I do not know; but I do know that the distance we have traveled from the spring must be three or four times the distance to the camp, had that infernal mare but kept the right course.

As I am beginning to feel warm I again climb to the back of the mare. She refuses to budge; absolutely will not move in the direction on which I must insist. The situation is desperate, and I lose my temper. All things have an end, they say; and I now find that this is true of my patience.

The piercing howl of a coyote near by shakes our nerves, and the mare almost jumps right from under me. My long suppressed anger is let loose. I dig

my heels hard into her flanks and beat her with the end of the rope. She makes a jump and is off straight against the storm, fairly flying thru the drifting snow.

The coyote howls again, and Bess goes all the faster. I try to hold her rein, but I am kept busy in keeping myself from being thrown. She strikes sparks out of the stones with every jump. We go over one ridge after the other, across dry creek-beds and thru brush, where she might easily stumble and break her own neck and mine. I may expect this to happen at any moment.

At first I thought only of the question, how I was to get free of her if she should fall. Then I felt a strong impulse to throw myself off her back at once and thus put an end to this uncanny ride. But no, it will not do. What chance would I have in the long winter night, with the coyotes on all sides, and without even a pocket-knife with which to defend myself?

While I am unwillingly taking this wild ride thru snow and storm, and while my limbs and thighs are gradually becoming more numb, and my hands are cramped from holding on to the rope and the mane of the mare; there are many memories that cross my mind, like flashes of lightning across the heavens. I remember my comrade. No doubt he has the hot supper dishes out and is waiting for me. He must think that I have been gone altogether too long; and if the mule has reached camp he may be up on the hill lighting a fire to guide me home.

Unpleasant as my situation is, I can not help

smiling at the idea. A signal fire in weather like this! I would have felt it before seeing it.

I have no time to calculate our course by noting the direction of the wind; I have enough to do in keeping my seat.

Then suddenly I see—what is it? A glow of light; the glow of a dying fire on the top of the ridge which we had just now crossed.

The canter changes into a trot. We go down a hill, and my leg brushes a perpendicular wall of rock; and in another second we are at the bottom of a ravine. Then my eyes are gladdened by a light shining dimly thru the canvas of our tent.

And in the shelter of the stone wall, by the side of the wagon and a bundle of hay, stands Julie taking nourishment. Thank heaven, we are at home.

I am not able to sleep that night. High above the ravine the storm still shrieks. Once in a while I hear the stamping of the mule or the mare. I lie thinking of the events of the evening, of human reason as against horse sense. I had pitted my knowledge against the instinct of the mare, and had been ingloriously defeated. She grew tired of my stubbornness, and took matters into her own hands —or her own feet, I should say. And thereby she saved my life.

SHEEPDOGS

"SPORT" AND "MIDGET"

CHAPTER ONE

SPORT AND MIDGET

MANY kinds of dogs may be used for the herding of sheep; but the collies are the best breed, and for that reason command the highest price.

In the states in which the sheep industry has a leading place, much trouble is taken to breed the best dogs. For these must be relied on to do most of the work. They are a prime necessity to the herder and the owner.

The herding of sheep has become the natural and proper business of these dogs. They were born among the sheep; they see sheep as soon as they open their eyes, and they have heard them even before they could see. And the progenitors of these dogs have lived and earned their food for generations as sheepdogs.

When I became a sheep-herder I was given two dogs as my helpers. One was a male of medium size called Sport. He was long-haired, and deep black all over except for a shade of brown on the belly and down near the paws. The leading strain in him was that of a sheepdog; but his shortened head was evidence that the strain was not pure.

My other dog was a diminutive female with the

appropriate name of Midget. She looked like a fox, only somewhat more yellow, or rather like a coyote; and to this day I believe that there was some coyote blood in her veins.

The temperament of the sheepdogs will determine the work for which the individual dog is best fitted. One that has a friendly nature and will not bite is used in herding the ewes that have lambs. One with a more polemical nature is put to watch the unruly yearlings, which sometimes must be handled more roughly. The biggest and most pugnacious dogs are put to the task of looking after the old rams.

Sport belonged to the middle class; so he was placed with the three thousand yearlings in my care.

In value as a sheepdog also he was merely an average dog; not one of the worst, and very far from one of the best. He was a dog of many moods; and these had to be taken into account when he was put to work.

In the cool morning he was ready for any kind of a job. When it was cold the yearlings would get up, and start out at full speed. I could not follow them on foot; and so I sent the dogs after them. When these felt disposed for the exercise they would keep near me and look me in the eyes, waiting for the signal to go. And when I gave the signal with a movement of the hand they would go as fast as they could.

Sheepdogs have been trained to obey signals, and not wait for spoken orders. All herders use the

same signs; so it makes no difference if the dogs often change masters. If we signal with the right hand the dog will go around to the right side of the flock of sheep, and will go to the left if we signal with the left hand. The dog occasionally stops and looks back. If the herder stands with both arms stretched out from the shoulders the dog will stand and wait. If the heather is too high for the dog to look over it, the dog will stand up on its hind legs or leap high in order to see its master or his signals. If the herder lowers one hand and signals with the other, the dog will go on; while if he lowers both at the same time, the dog will come back. I have seen a thorobred collie sent clear out of sight by a herder standing on a boulder and signaling with a yellow oilcloth coat.

But in the middle of the day, with the hot air fairly sizzling, when Sport was taking his siesta behind a sagebrush, with the tongue hanging far out, he was not so willing to do my bidding. He then never looks expectantly into my eyes; he would be interested in something else, or he would lie with his eyes closed when I signaled to him. At such times it was only by talking to him that I could induce him to look up.

When it was then made plain to him that he must go out on duty he would start on a lazy trot; and then stop and look at me, hoping that I would give him the signal to come back. When I ordered him on he would go, but as slowly as he well could, and come to a stop every three or four rods.

If I shouted to him in an angry tone he might get up a little more speed till he was out of sight. Sometimes he would do the errand on which he had been sent, and then come sneaking back from some other direction. Or he might not come back, but hide himself somewhere in the shade of a hillock of heather. Nearly always he would follow at my heels when I went for a walk. But it sometimes happened that he kept away from me when he thought that he was not in favor; and then on several occasions I did not see him again before night.

However, the caprice of Sport was as nothing compared with the whims of Midget. This little fox-like animal had the most impulsive nature with which I ever have had to deal. If she was in the mood for it she would be scrupulously obedient. I could then send her farther afield than I could send Sport. But I could not drive her to do anything if she would rather not. She would then run away, especially in the early morning; and I would not see her again before I came home at night and found her taking her ease under the wagon.

When there were strained relations between us she never would make the first move to bring about a reconciliation. She would slink by me like a little fox, and pretend not to see me. When I came out with her supper she would not look up, and would not move till I had climbed back into the wagon. Even then she would watch the window at the end of the wagon and would lie still if I was looking at her. Midget was a peculiar canine. I never could

become as familiar with her as with Sport. She did not like to be petted and fondled. She quietly went her lonely way; she was like a wild animal only half-tamed, or like a coyote born in captivity.

CHAPTER TWO

SPORT'S ARCH ENEMY, "SATAN"

AMONG my three thousand unruly yearlings there were twenty black sheep, or "markers." When occasion offers we count these to make sure how many if any have strayed from the fold.

About half of our "markers" were old rams which had been many times on the mountain pastures; and now when the warm weather came in June, and the grass began to wither on the prairies, they began to long for the hills, and if given a chance they would run away.

This made the work all the harder for both me and the dogs. There was one great and robust ram, which I had named "Satan," and which was especially troublesome. He was strong, and as fleet as a deer. When we were off our guard he would set out for the mountains, always followed by some of the yearlings. Some of the rams had bells; but Satan, who needed it most, did not. There was a spare bell in the wagon; and the day after I had caught the old sinner nearly a mile from the flock with a couple of hundred yearlings at his heels, I decided to hang a bell around his neck.

It was noon and scorching hot. I sent the dogs to round up the sheep on some level ground near the wagon and got them packed in a close bunch.

But Satan was wiser than I and the dogs together. He always had a bad conscience and kept in the middle of the flock. He was so much larger than the yearlings that it was an easy matter for him to jump over them or to push his way between them.

But Sport knew Satan as well as I. He had not forgotten all the trouble which the ram had given him on these hot days. So now the dog was thristing for revenge; and he forgot the heat when it dawned on him that I was on the warpath against that infernal ram.

While Midget kept the sheep together, I and Sport went right in among them. And when Sport was fully assured that the campaign was directed against his arch-enemy, he put his whole soul into the work before him.

They jumped over the backs of the others, the ram in the lead and the dog right after him. The ram tried to stay in the thickest of the bunch; but Sport and I managed to get him out to the outskirts of it, and then out on the level away from the other sheep.

When the ram found himself alone he ran like a deer, with the dog like a wolf at his heels.

It did not take Sport long to catch his enemy and lay hold on him; while I and Midget followed as fast as we could. Sport had fastened his teeth into a forefoot of the ram just below the knee; but the ram was strong and pulled the dog with him nilly-willy.

The nearer I came the harder did the ram try to get loose. He walked backward dragging the

dog, which was settled back on his haunches and hanging on like grim death to the ram's leg.

"Hold him, Sport, hold him," I shouted.

When I was right by them Satan tried his very utmost to shake the dog off. He turned so quickly that the dog described a circle around him, still hanging on by his teeth.

And yet the ram would not surrender; he made a desperate fight for liberty. Then it was that Sport showed what he could do when put to it. He let go his hold on the leg; and quick as lightning he caught the ram over the nose and gave him a sharp jerk forward and then to one side; and the ram, not prepared for this manoeuver, was lying on his back with all his feet in the air.

I fastened the bell around the ram's neck and let him go.

It is in cold weather that the sheep-herder has his hands full.

In warm weather the sheep are lazy. They move slowly, put their heads under the heather and remain there as long as there is a blade of grass to be found. Not till then do they move on to the next bush. If it is very warm they will lie down near the watering place and not move for hours.

One cloudy day at noon they would not come down to the waterhole. I wanted to go to the wagon and get my dinner; but it was some distance away, and I did not dare leave the sheep before they had lain down. Usually a flock of sheep will lie down to rest after it has been "turned" a few times. When I had ordered the sheep right

about once or twice I induced the yearlings to lie down—all but a few of them, who with Satan in the lead were determined to go on.

At last I persuaded them also to lie down, and then I went toward the wagon, and they were soon lost to sight.

About half way to the wagon was a hill from which I should be able to see them. Not being quite confident that they were to be trusted I went up to the top of this hill to make sure. The sheep were lying where I left them;—all excepting the black ram, who with a few followers again was far on his way east to the mountains.

Sport saw them also and went joyously after them when I gave him the signal. Had Sport been a first class sheepdog I might have let him watch the sheep while I went to my dinner, but that was out of the question.

The ram and his misguided followers did not see the danger before it was upon them. I could see how they suddenly turned, and how they raised a cloud of dust on their way back. When the dog had done his errand he, also, came home.

However, the ram soon started off again, and Sport again went after him. This time the ram was alone; and the dog made something more of an affair of it, following the ram far afield.

Now I felt sure that the ram would stay quietly by the fold. But as I was about to descend the hill, and turned to look once more at the sheep, I saw the ram again walking to the east, this time with leisurely steps as tho everything were all right.

Tho the air was chilly, Sport seemed to think that I was asking too much of him. He growled a little when ordered to fetch that ram back once more; but having no choice in the matter he went.

This time Satan saw the dog in good season, and was able to get back to the fold before the dog reached him, thus escaping any maltreatment on the part of Sport. I sat a long time waiting for the dog, but he did not come.

While I was sitting there and straining my eyes I again noticed that ram. He was marching as before with long steps and dignified mien, as tho owning in fee simple all the liberty in the world. But there was put a sudden end to this proud and self-confident march; for Sport, who had been lying in wait behind a bush, dashed out and attacked the ram with the fury of a wild beast.

Sport would seem to have made up his mind to settle this matter now for good and all. For he went at the ram like an avalanch, and returned to the attack again and again, with no let-up before the ram was among the other sheep, where he should be. For some days after this the ram made no farther trouble.

Sport had one of the worst faults which a sheep-dog can have in that he had the instincts of the hunter; and nothing would cure him of it. To him sheep herding was work, while rabbit hunting was fun; and his guiding principle in life was: pleasure first.

If while on duty he saw a rabbit, he would at once make after it, and forget all about the sheep, often

going right thru the flock. He never caught the rabbit; but that seemed to be of minor importance. When he again saw one he made after it with as much zest as ever.

However, rabbits were not his only obsession. There were many other animals, also, on the prairie; and Sport considered it his duty to examine carefully every hole and burrow.

The one animal which he did not chase was the coyote. When a coyote appeared in the offing, Sport either closed his eyes or turned his head some other way.

CHAPTER THREE

A DEATH STRUGGLE

IN the beginning of July we moved up into the mountains. The place was more than forty miles from our winter and spring grazing grounds, and there was almost no water along the way.

Stubb was foreman and had the provision wagon; and he followed the banks of the river, while I with the sheep took the short cut across the hills. He pointed out to me a landmark which I was to keep in sight, and where we were to meet in the evening.

The first night we camped by a small creek. The sheep were tired with a long day's march and settled down to rest as soon as the sun had gone down.

Next morning we were off before daylight. There was little grass, and little time to eat what little there was. All the creek beds we saw were dry. That night we found no water. The third day was like the second: nothing to eat but shrivelled grass, and very little of that. All day I was compelled to make use of the dogs to drive the sheep forward. In a canteen slung over my shoulder I had water enough for myself and the dogs. It was a very trying day. This was a hard road to travel; steep hills and long ridges and stretches of plain cut thru with deep and all but impassable ravines, and over it all the blistering rays of the July sun.

As the sun went down I saw a thin column of smoke against the evening sky.

This was Stubb's signal. Again we spent the night at a place where we found no water. We were obliged to stand guard over the sheep all night to keep them together. They would not lie down. All night they walked about and bleated for water. Sport and I kept watch till midnight, when we were relieved by Stubb and Midget.

Long before dawn we were on the march again. It was a cool morning, and I made all possible haste while this coolness lasted. A couple of hours before midday the sheep began to smell water. We were on the top of a hill with a gentle slope down to a creek. At intervals along the banks were some old and gnarled trees. To us this was an oasis in the desert.

Before long all the sheep were racing down the slope.

In many things the sheep are a strange folk. When they come near a spring or creek they break into a wild run. All want to be first. I had been left far behind when they reached the creek.

When we had come up with them we, the dog and I, went some distance down the water-course to bring all together. Some had run on three or four times as far as necessary to find water. When I had made about half of the distance on the way back, Sport came flying to me, barking as loudly as he could.

Right in front of me he stopped and kept on barking as if he had something on his mind. He

would run a little way up the ravine, then stop and come slowly back, then bark and turn again. He must want to tell me something, so I followed his lead, making what speed I could. He kept some distance ahead and turned many times to call on me to hurry.

Under a pair of trees he stopped and barked down the slope to the creek at the foot of it. I understood that something was wrong and put my best foot forward.

Here the banks rose straight up some three or four feet from the water, which was but a foot deep. But the bottom was soft mud; and down in this mud, some on top and some under them, and all fighting for their lives, were about twenty sheep. I had to wade out into it, sinking in to my hips, in order to get the sheep back on dry land. Four of them were dead, drowned under the weight of the others in the mud. All would have died had not the dog given me warning.

At sundown the following day we reached our destination.

CHAPTER FOUR

JACK AND SPORT ON THE CHASE

THEN began the happy days, for me and for the dogs. The natural beauty of the place was wonderful and fascinated me completely. To the north and west, far, far below me, lay the prairie with its ridges and ravines, plateaus and terraces, its water-courses with and without water, its scattered trees and level stretches.

Where the mountain and prairie meet there is a river with a heavy fringe of trees along the banks. These form a green band winding across the barren plain. They are the symbol of fertility and a delight to the eye.

The river is the dividing line between the dried and blistered prairies and the green hills; which latter lead, by gentle slopes or by a steep climb, up to the white back of the mountain, to the fields of perennial snow.

Up among the mountains are good grass, good water, and a wide prospect. There is the river rushing noisily down over rock and precipice; there are the smaller rivulets with great, deep reservoirs close up to the mountain wall, with the trout disporting themselves at the surface of the water; there are the creeks cutting their way thru deep ravines, where the wind sighs heavily among the

trees at the bottom; ravines resounding with unceasing sadness and pathos.

Here are open glades and patches of forest. At some places in the woods the trees are wide apart, so that one may ride or drive between them. At other places they stand so close that it is difficult to get thru even on foot. These patches of forest are a delight when seen in the bright sunshine; but under a cloudy and lowering sky they look dark and threatening.

We had peaceful times, the sheep and dogs and I. Among the mountains the herder seldom has the opportunity to spend his nights in the wagon, tho the wagon is supposed to be his home. In it are his bed, table, seats, and cookstove. It is a cabin and may be made very cozy. The wagon is left standing at the watering-place, where the sheep spend the greater part of the warm day.

At four or five o'clock in the afternoon the sheep begin to bestir themselves. They move slowly, all the time busily eating. When the herder has eaten his supper he goes after them and keeps watch over them till darkness falls.

Where the sheep lie down there the herder also must spend the night. In the early morning they scramble to their feet and begin to feed; and the herder must stay with them till they have had enough, or till the heat of the day drives them to the watering-place. In cloudy weather it may be necessary to watch them all day.

Between the hours of seven and eight in the morning I generally left them in order to get my

own breakfast. By that time the day would begin to grow warm, and the long rows of sheep filed down to the water. It might be two hours before all had slaked their thirst.

After that I had the whole day to myself, free to do what I liked I might take a book and lie down in the shade of some tree. Or I might stroll over to one of the many creeks and in a short time catch enough trout for both dinner and supper. I might take my gun and saunter down some strange ravine, find a seat on some fallen tree and revel in the enjoyment of nature and solitude, liberty and the blue heavens.

Two or three miles away there was another herder in the service of my employer. He was a young fellow, only a little older than I. His name was Joseph, and we called him Joe for short.

Joe had a dog named Jack; a big, gray veteran, known as one of the best dogs in these parts in dealing with lambs. His eyes were always running, his head big and very long. Joe had clipped the body and tail, leaving only a ring of hair around the former and a tuft at the end of the latter, making Jack a most laughable spectacle. When the lambs were separated from their mothers—that is, when they were hid from sight by some bush—and Jack was near, he always hurried to their assistance.

Sometimes the lambs ran at him, mistaking him for mother, and sometimes they ran from him. At any rate they nearly always ran away from the flock whether or no.

Then it was that old Jack showed his skill. If

the lamb was one of those that stopped and stood still, Jack with his long nose would push it back in the right direction. If it was one of those that strayed from the fold and ran—in the wrong direction of course— Jack would leap over and around the bushes and get in front of it, and would not desist before he had manoeuvered it back to the fold. Old Jack had in the course of his checkered career saved many lambs that were headed for destruction.

Joe and I spent much time together. Some days I rode over to his grazing ground, and on other days he came to see me. In this way Sport and Jack met and became close friends. Midget seldom went with me. She preferred to spend the day in the shade under the wagon or to go away by herself.

Here in the mountains Sport had more leisure to develop his talent for hunting. I let him follow his own inclinations, as I knew that I could not cure him of them. But he was not satisfied to go on the hunt alone; he wanted company. There were not many to choose among; and so Jack, old and trusty Jack, became his partner in the chase.

To Jack this was a new business. He was merely an excellent sheepdog who had graduated in that branch of learning. But when Sport had induced him a few times to go hunting, Jack, also, seemed to lose his interest in his proper work.

This was not to Joe's liking, but what could he do about it?

In a burrow near our wagon—hollowed out be-

tween the roots of a tree was a pesky marmot which Sport had many times tried to take prisoner. At least ten times a day Sport went on a hunt after this ugly rodent. But the marmot, which spent most of its time on a stump near by, would slide down into its burrow, and from that safe retreat it would abuse the dog in the most shameful way. And all that the exasperated dog could do was to bark and snarl, for the roots of the tree kept him from digging for the beast. The marmot seemed to enjoy immensely the abortive efforts of the dog. As soon as Sport had gone away the marmot again mounted the stump and began to scream and scold.

This at last got on Sport's nerves. He never had any peace when near the wagon; he was all the time being disturbed by that pestiferous marmot. The beast interfered with his sleep by day and his dreams at night. But Sport had some brains in his shapely head. He had more than once gained his end by strategy; and being now convinced that his agility alone never would enable him to catch that hated animal, he began to consider if it might not be done in some other way.

It was a cloudy day, and on such days the sheep were ill at ease. His lively interest in catching the marmot made Sport forget that he had any duties with respect to the sheep. He went and fetched Jack. This faithful shepherd was no doubt induced to desert his flock by a promise of something out of the ordinary. They came back together, and stopped in the brush, not to let the marmot know that

they were two; and there Sport by some means instructed Jack in his duties.

Then Jack came out of the brush, barking loudly to draw the marmot's attention, and heading straight for the stump on which it sat.

The marmot saw him at once and began to chatter vituperative epithets at him; keeping it up till Jack was only twenty feet away. Then it disappeared in its burrow, scolding all the time; and down there it turned and kept on calling Jack the most insulting names while only a few inches from the dog's nose. Jack barked down at it a few times and then went away at a somewhat leisurely pace, but still kept up his barking. His big voice gradually died away till it could barely be heard. Then the marmot poked its head from between the roots and climbed cautiously into the open. Seeing the dog at some distance it ran over to the stump and again began to draw on its large fund of scurrilous language.

However, behind the tree between the roots of which the marmot had its safe retreat stood Sport. There he had taken his stand while the marmot was in its burrow, and had remained there silent and motionless till the beast again was on top of the stump. Now Sport came out from his ambush and took his stand over the entrance to the burrow, thus cutting off the marmot's retreat. He indulged himself in a deep growl, which caused the marmot to hold its tongue and examine into the situation.

Sport was in no hurry to make an end of it. He now had the whip hand; and he wanted to enjoy his

triumph over this hated beast, which had so often made sport of him. But the marmot now had no time to consider the question whether or not it had done the wise thing in abusing the dog. Now the one thing essential was to save its only and precious life; and to do this it fled from the scene as fast as its fat body and short legs would permit.

But it was not for long. After two long jumps Sport had the beast between his teeth and crushed its bones and put an end to its troubles for good and all.

Then Jack came and wanted his share of the spoils. He had helped in the manoeuver. Sport could not see the matter from that angle. Jack insisted, however, and the two dogs fastened on each his own end of the carcass and pulled and tore at it as if possessed. They kept this up until they got into a fight; and tho Sport was strong and resolute he was soundly punished by Jack the giant, who gave him a drubbing for his greediness.

In the mean time Joe was having trouble with his sheep. He was much put out by the absence of his dog, and came over to ask me if I had seen the animal.

And so the day's fun ended with a good whipping for Jack also, who had shirked his duty and gone hunting.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRAGIC FATE OF MIDGET

MIDGET was a great help to me at this time; that is to say, when she was in the humor for it. When she was not, nothing on earth could induce her to do anything but what she liked.

The yearlings give more trouble than do the older sheep. They are more unruly, become more easily confused, and they run about more when the weather is chilly. But on the other hand, if they have not had a fright, they are more quiet thru the night and more slow to get up in the morning.

At this season we had fine days and glorious nights up here in the mountains. The nights were cool even in the middle of the summer; and it was a great luxury to crawl in between the warm blankets under the waterproof tarpaulin which sheltered the bed from the chin to the feet; to lie there on one's back and stare up into the dark vault with its thousands of stars.

How I did enjoy lying thus, hearing the horse nibbling the grass, with the gentle breezes rustling in the heather, listening to the breathing of the dog near by and the cry of the coyote in the distance, and to see the shooting stars tracing their lines of light across the dark sky.

The stars never seem so near as on such a night.

But in these high altitudes the weather is an uncertain quantity.

One morning after such a glorious evening a fine, mist-like rain was falling. The yearlings were restless, and were on their feet before daylight had come.

I took both dogs with me, and for some hours we were busy. The horse had strayed away during the night; at any rate I could not find it in the morning. So I was obliged to walk, and in the wet heather I was soaked to the waist.

For this reason I may have been out of sorts and may have asked too much of the dogs. For Midget repeatedly hesitated to obey me; and later on, when I had called to her in an angry tone because of her slowness, she disappeared. I saw her sneaking away between the tufts of heather, with lowered head and drooping tail, like a fox or coyote after an abortive effort to catch a rabbit. I may have used some unparliamentary language when I saw her deserting me.

Afterward I felt penitent; for it was the last time that I saw Midget alive. She was accidentally shot and killed that afternoon. Two horsemen coming up the hills had taken her for a small coyote. When they discovered their mistake, it was too late to rectify it.

It was not to be wondered at that she was mistaken for a coyote, as she was all the time puttering around by herself. She had the nature of an untamed animal. She would not, like other dogs, rec-

ognize man as her master. So she at last died the usual death of a wild beast.

As a rule the sheep have a most voracious appetite and a plentiful lack of wit. When food is to be had and the heat does not take away their appetite, they eat all day from early morn till dewy eve. And often when there is a full moon they do not wait for morning either. They get up in the night to do their duty in life—to eat till they are round as barrels and seem about to burst.

A good sheepdog will wake up the herder when the sheep leave their resting-place at night. But Sport was not that kind of a dog. On more than one night that summer I woke up to find myself alone; except for the dog, who would be lying there as quietly as tho nothing were wrong, and as tho the sheep were not his concern anyhow.

One night I discovered that the whole flock of sheep had left me for parts unknown. A bright moon was shining. There was no wind stirring and no sound to be heard. I got up and looked about me, but could see nothing. The tinkle of the bells was dying out in the distance.

Sport seemed to know nothing more than I about the matter. He kept close to me, looked where I looked and followed where I led. Not once did he seem to know anything but what I could see for myself.

So I at last went and lay down again, no wiser than before. Sport snuggled close up to me as usual, seemingly without caring anything about that

flock of sheep. When I woke up at break of day the dog was gone.

I hurriedly saddled the horse; I must try to find the sheep before they strayed too far. There was danger that they might join other flocks. After a quarter of an hour or so I saw them far down on a great level plain. They were then on their way back with two dogs at their heels; and these dogs proved to be Sport and old Jack.

The conviction then came to me that Sport had known all the time where the sheep had gone; but he had acted as tho ignorant of it in order that he might not be sent after them in the night. For keen hunter as he was, still there was nothing which he feared more than falling in with a coyote at night. But now he had made good by starting off at break of day and fetching Jack to help in bringing the sheep home. This was the only time in my experience with him that Sport fetched his friend for any other purpose than that of going out hunting.

One morning in September I was awakened by the sound of bells. The night had been cold; and when I poked my head out from under the tarpaulin I saw a fog so thick that I could not see it. This was the earliest reminder of autumn, a reminder that the glorious days up in the mountains would soon be a thing of the past. I had a busy day. I could see but a few feet into the fog. I had nothing to go by but the sound of the bells, and I must go around it in a wide circle in order to keep the sheep together after a fashion. It was the worst day of the summer. The yearlings were restless

and wanted to run away; the horse I could not find, of course; the heather was wet; and as a result of all this my temper was at the boiling-point.

I had no breakfast that morning. Noon came, and I had no dinner. I was wet to the waist. The dog could not help me; I could see nothing, and so could not send him after the sheep. Several times in following the sound of the bells I stumbled onto small bunches of sheep that had separated from the main flock.

It was a festival day for the old ram yclept Satan. He seemed to understand how helpless I was; and he used the opportunity to enjoy his liberty as never before.

Sport was not utterly useless, however. When we heard the bells somewhere over in the fog the dog would show me the way. His eyes were no better than mine, but he had his keen nose to go by. He had not, as is the case with us humans, lost his sense of smell by long ages of disuse. He could now guide me with perfect confidence. Black Satan was of course our most troublesome customer. It was his black fleece which saved his life that day; for had a white sheep been such an insufferable nuisance I would have shot it dead. But even as it was I did not have "markers" enough; and I could not well spare any, not even Satan.

Sport was furiously angry with that old ram; he hated the animal for having given him so much unnecessary work to do on warm days. In the thick fog he could not see the animal, but he could smell it all the time; and when he surprised it in the act of

leading a bunch of yearlings astray, and I gave him permission, he would fly at the black ram like a wolf and continue to worry it till I called him off.

Usually the sheep are stubborn, always disposed to resist authority. Satan was the worst in my flock; and the fog giving the old ram an unusually good opportunity, the behavior of the beast was atrocious. It seemed to be possessed by His Majesty after whom it was named. There was no limit to its measures. It had been fairly crazy to come up into the mountains, and now it was still more crazy to go down again to the plains.

The fog stayed with us thru the afternoon; and Sport and I were wet and hungry, having brushed our way thru the wet heather all day and having had nothing to eat.

Just before twilight we were down by the ravine. We had met the sheep farther down and had turned them back toward the wagon. It was a long time since they had been given any salt; and now I wanted to collect them around the wagon and give them some, hoping to keep them there for the night.

We had turned them without much trouble. The yearlings seemed to have no objection to going back to the wagon. I had begun to rejoice in the prospect of dry clothes, warm food and hot coffee; when I heard a bell out of the fog below us. I knew who it was. My sense of hearing had been sharpened thru my listening all day for the sound of bells; and I was now able to distinguish Satan's bell from the others, tho to the untrained ear all sheep-bells sound pretty much alike.

The dog heard it when I did, and he uttered a deep growl. He, also, knew with whom we had to deal. We must go back for the wicked old ram. We fell in with a number of yearlings going down the hill in single file. When the last one saw us it turned and ran back to the main flock. The next in order followed, and then the third, and so down the whole file till it reached Satan, the leader.

He also now wanted to run back with the others, but was not allowed to do it; for Sport flew at him with ungovernable fury. To save himself Satan had to run the other way. Some hundred yards to the west was the big ravine, a deep chasm with perpendicular walls two or three hundred feet high.

The ram went west right toward this ravine, with the irate dog after him. In a jiffy they were swallowed up by the fog. The barking of Sport became less distinct. I followed them; and in a few minutes I met the dog. He wagged his tail and seemed in a general way very happy. He rubbed himself against me, as was his wont when he expected me to pat him.

"What have you been doing, old Sport?" He jumped around in front of me, and barked as when we were especially good friends and were having a talk. In that way he led me to the ravine.

Here he went out to the brink and barked into the sea of fog, down into the abyss, from the bottom of which we could hear the rippling of the water in the river.

Then I understood that the ram, either because it was afraid of the dog or because it was unable to

stop short, had made a leap into the deep chasm. The poor animal had run thru the fog till this gave way beneath it, and had plunged down till the fog swallowed it. With my mind's eye I could picture to myself what the animal must look like down there among the boulders after a sheer fall of two or three hundred feet.

CHAPTER SIX

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF SPORT

SPORT continued to take Jack with him on his hunting expeditions. Which caused Joe to use unprintable language; for as the weather grew colder, he needed the dog all the more.

One evening Sport did not come home. I wondered at this; for he usually came before dark. He was too much afraid of the coyotes to stay out nights.

In the morning when I got up the dog was still missing. As soon as the sheep had settled down to rest at the watering-place, I saddled the horse and set out to find the dog.

I rode over to Joe; but he denied having seen him. Sport was gone and had left no trace. I never saw him again. In spite of Joe's denial I still believe that he shot my dog in order to keep it from further corrupting his own. But I could not prove it, and so I could take no steps in the matter.

On the following day Stubb came up to us with provisions. He brought with him a pure-bred collie, a little pup which he had intended to leave with me in order that it might be trained together with Sport. Now that Sport was gone I would have

to get along with only the pup until Stubb found another dog for me.

The pup was little and of tender age, only five or six weeks old, and could not now be of any use to me. It was black, with belly and legs of a lighter shade, and was uncommonly handsome and intelligent.

When the yearlings and especially the old rams noticed that Sport was no longer with us they began to be less careful to obey my orders.

When they were going away and I gave a loud whistle they would always turn around as before. As a rule they had lifted their heads when they heard the whistle, and looked to see where I was. Then when they saw the dog at my side they knew what would be done to them if they did not obey. But when a day or two had passed without their seeing Sport they grew more indifferent. They always lifted their heads when I whistled; and when they saw only me and the harmless puppy—or they did not see it for the high heather—they went on according to their own sweet will.

However, it counted for something that the pup came of a long line of sheepdogs. It was a pure-bred collie, and to herd sheep was its natural business. It must be trained to do it according to orders, but it had inherited the rudiments of the art from a long line of collie ancestors.

When I for the first time turned the collie loose against some yearling sheep that stood looking at us with contempt, it did not shame its noble lineage. It ran at them from the rear and struck at them

with the nose between their hind legs. When that did not bring results the pup nipped at them angrily with its milkteeth, biting them on the inner side of the flank.

The pup was valuable because the strain was pure, and because of its being a female. The owner impressed on me that I must treat her well and be careful not to lose her, nor to spoil her.

Like most thorobred dogs she was extremely sensitive. If I spoke harshly to her—as I sometimes must do when she was overzealous in her duties—she would creep into hiding behind some hillock, or she would keep at a distance. When I turned and looked at her she stopped also, and stood looking me in the eye as if begging my forgiveness. Her own eyes would shine with hopeful expectancy, and her short tail wag so hard that the whole hindpart of the body wagged with it.

So she would stand till I spoke to her in a friendly tone. Then she came to me and tried her utmost to show me her sincere love and gratitude.

In September it is autumn up in the mountains. The mists come farther and farther down the slopes. In the morning it lies thick athwart the higher levels. It hides forest and snowfield, precipices and pinnacles, even when the sun shines bright and warm farther down.

But there were some warm days in September also, and there were mild autumn days with brilliant sunshine and high, blue heavens.

On a certain warm and bright morning the puppy was so over-zealous in her work, that I several

times warned her to moderate her zeal. Each time she would quiet down for a few minutes, and then forget my warning. To train her properly I must first teach her discipline by giving her to understand that the end of disobedience was a whipping. But I could not find it in my heart to whip the innocent little thing; so when she went against my orders and attacked the sheep, I threw my hat at her. The soft felt hat hit her, and she howled as if every bone in her body were broken. Then she took to her heels and was soon lost to view in the tall heather.

I instantly repented that I had frightened her. I began at once to look for her, to call and whistle, to use my most tender words and softest tones in trying to induce her to come back to me. But she did not come. She was in hiding, or she had lost her bearings. For more than an hour I tried in vain to find her. It was necessary for me then to look after my sheep, which had already gone far astray.

Later in the forenoon, when the sheep had lain down to rest by the watercourse, I took up the search again and kept at it till noon, but without success.

Poor little puppy. In my thoughtlessness I had given her such a fright that I might never see her again. She was so little and strange to the place and so unused to being alone. It would not be easy for her to find her way among the bushes. To her the heather would be as tall trees and the heath an interminable forest.

At noon I went home without having found the

puppy; and all the afternoon I suffered mental torture. What if the poor little thing out there should meet with some mishap? I could imagine what she suffered, alone and hungry and thirsty; for it was a blistering hot day.

In the evening, as soon as the sheep were resting quietly, I went on a new search. I thought it best to take with me some meat and water. I whistled till my lips were sore, and shouted myself hoarse, but all to no purpose; the pup had vanished completely.

It began to grow dark, the sheep were in bed, and a melancholy wind stirred the heather. With heavy heart I got ready for bed; I had never before felt so lonesome.

I saw the white tarpaulin showing in the highlight; and on coming nearer I saw something black on it. And there lay the pup curled into a round ball, while the shades of night were falling fast. When I came near she jumped up and barked bravely. I was glad that it was I who came—it might have been a coyote.

I wondered how she had been able to find my bed, as this was far from the place at which I had thrown my hat at her in the morning. I took her up into my arms and held her close to my breast, and petted and fondled her.

I could see it in her eyes and by her wagging tail that she had forgiven me; and when she had eaten her fill of meat and had slaked her thirst with the water brought to her in my hat, we were again the very best of friends.

That night the pup slept under the blankets snuggled up to me with her head on my arm. And I was glad that I had her there when the coyotes made night hideous with their howling and the brave puppy growled an answering challenge.

I was the last of the herders to go down from the mountain this fall. The ewes and lambs were first taken down to the winter quarters; for in the latter part of September a blizzard might come any day. The yearlings could stand up better against such a storm.

They were trying days, those last ones in the mountains. When it was not rainy the weather was foggy. The days were raw and disagreeable, and at night the autumn storms swept heavy and sad over the hills.

At last Stubb came for me. I had been glad to come up here in the early summer, and now I was equally glad to go down to the prairie again.

We camped the first night by the river at the foot of the mountain. We had found a sheltered nook, but in the night I could hear the storm winds blow up among the peaks. Next morning the mountain was covered with snow. The sun came out and shed its light over the slopes as we continued on our way, while a cloud enveloped the mountain in shadow. We drove out over the prairie in the sunshine, towards light and life, while back of us stood the mountain, lonely and deserted.

NERO

CHAPTER ONE

BILL, DOT, AND BOB

DOT was a puppy which I at one time knew. I remember well the first time that I saw it. I came driving by; when it barked at me with a piping voice, meanwhile wagging its tail in a spirit of friendship, the brilliant puppy-eyes asking me to excuse the liberty. It was small and slender, smooth of skin, and coal black with white breast and a little white hair on the paws and the extremity of the tail.

I had to stop the horses in order to talk to it for a moment and to fondle it. It wagged its tail so vigorously that the head and the part to which the tail is affixed sometimes came in contact with each other.

Presently some children came out of the same tent from which the pup had appeared, followed by a great black greyhound.

The pup ran to them, wagging its tail and rubbing itself affectionately against their legs; gave the big grey-hound a loving caress and went into the tent from which it came out again at once to bark after me when I drove away.

This was the first time that I saw the tent and these children, as I had been only a day or two in this neighborhood.

When I reached the camp where I was working, I asked the foreman about these new arrivals, and was told that the man was our new blacksmith. The wife was sick, he said; had some dangerous disease of the lungs.

It was for her sake that the man had come to these parts. He had brought the whole family several hundred miles in a prairie schooner.

Next day I met the smith himself, and had a glimpse of his wife and two little girls some distance away.

Usually the dogs followed the man to the smithy, or they visited him there several times in the course of the day. I met them there many times, heard their history from their owner, and became one of the friends of the family.

The smith had owned the greyhound a long time. This animal, also, was black with small white patches on the paws, but not on the tail. It was the most powerful looking grey hound that I ever had seen; and I pictured to myself what could be made of it by a proper course of training. I may have gone so far as to wish that the dog were mine. For the country round about had many coyotes, some few wolves, and of rabbits and other game a countless multitude.

But Bill was not for sale. I might borrow him, said the good-natured smith, if I could induce him to go with me; but the hound was slow to make new friends.

The puppy Dot was quite different; wanted to be on friendly terms with everybody. It was wide awake all day, playing with the children and cultivating new friendships.

Dot had been given to the smith by some farmer along the way. Its mother was half greyhound, but the farmer knew nothing about the other parent. It might be any one of a score of dogs in the neighborhood.

The mother of Dot was an almost perfect specimen of a greyhound, except for her small size. So the smith said when acquainting me with the pup's pedigree and family history.

Then he pointed to Dot, who could stand up straight right under Bill, and remarked: "She will never be any larger than she is."

Tho Dot still had the clumsiness of the young pup, everybody who knew anything about dogs could see that she was of the greyhound strain. The slender and finely arched back, the long legs and lean body, the wonderful suppleness so unusual in a pup, and which made it seem so grown up whenever its antics did not remind one of young puppydom—all these things would tell the fancier what breed of dog it was.

But her ears were longer and were hanging down more than should be, the nose was not so pointed as that of a greyhound, and she was more rounded and more beautiful.

It was late summer or early fall, the weather still warm. I had to drive much, for water and hay

and provisions, sometimes over long and lonely roads.

I should have liked to take Bill with me on these trips. The owner did not object; for the dog was beginning to grow fat from lack of exercise. But for a long time Bill persisted in declining the honor of my acquaintance.

However, what is called stick-to-it-iveness will win at last.

I was firmly determined to secure to myself the friendship and affection of Bill, and I would not abandon my purpose because of his failure to respond to my first advances.

I began by being good to Dot, on whom the big greyhound always kept an eye, looking on himself as being in a manner of speaking her guardian. When I gave Dot some delicacy, stolen from the cook's tent, Bill always came over to us in order to see what was doing. I offered him something also, but it was a long time before he would take anything from my hand.

Dot, on the other hand, soon became my good friend. She would have been glad to go with me when I went away. She would run after me for some distance; and then turn and see Bill, who always stood watching her. Then she ran back to him.

I kept up the practice of giving the two dogs food, until they would come to me whenever they were hungry. So I won their good will, second only to their regard for the smith himself.

Bill was a trained hunter—all greyhounds are

born with this instinct. He knew very well what a gun was. Many a time when I took my rifle and went my way his eyes were full of longing to go with me.

Sometimes he stood looking after me till I was out of sight; and he plainly was strongly tempted to come with me, but was kept from doing it by his natural pride and dignity.

Affection is often a mere matter of habit. We meet, think nothing of it at first; then suddenly we must part, and we discover that we miss each other sadly. We had fallen into the habit of being together, and this habit we call friendship, or affection.

It is the same thing with members of the brute creation. I knew this, and kept forcing my friendship on Bill, till he at last forgot his dignity and responded to my advances, presumably without knowing anything of the change being brought about.

He began to go with me now and then; at first only on my shortest trips, when I went for a barrel of water. But after that he became my steady companion on my long, lonely trips over the prairie.

When the snow came the tent was too cold for the horses. A stable must be built, and it became my duty to haul the lumber. The nearest sawmill was far up the mountain. To get back reasonably early in the evening I had to set out long before the break of day. Four horses had a hard job hauling the empty wagon up to the mill; while the brake was needed nearly all the time on the way home.

One hill was so steep that I found it necessary to cut down a tree and use that as a drag.

On one of these trips I met a poodle-dog. It seemed to have dropped right down out of the sky. It followed me, possibly for the reason that I was the only person there. It had the appearance of being a pet poodle belonging to some childless lady in the city. I never did find out how this poodle came to be out there at the sawmill, which had already shut down for the winter.

The little dog followed me as if I for years had been the only man it had known. And when it had been fed that first evening and the next morning it acted as tho fully determined never to desert me.

Now, dogs are often very jealous. As the poodle began to keep by me I noted a change in the demeanor of Bill. It was plain that he, formerly so proud and cold, now was jealous. He now even condescended to show that he liked to have me caress him.

As the work went on there came more people to our camp. Some came alone, others with their whole family; and nearly every family had one or two dogs.

One of these was a big, hairy mongrel, one of the ringleaders in all fights.

Bill was a very peculiar dog. He would not keep company with any of his kind excepting Dot. He seemed to think that he was too good to associate with the common herd. He was an aristocrat in his democracy and was therefore hated by the proletariat.

Besides, it was his nature not to fight unless he must. He would hesitate in a way which seemed to border closely on cowardice. But if one had ever seen him fight, and noted the lean body with its muscles of iron, one would know that when Bill would not fight he was held back by something very like a moral principle.

He was in the habit of trotting around by himself. One day the other dogs sneaked after him and fell on him at some distance from the camp. Had there been any cowardice in his heart he could easily have escaped by running away, fleet-footed greyhound that he was. But he stood his ground and defended himself till he was badly wounded. He had left the bloody marks of his teeth on the other dogs. The leader of these was the big mongrel, whose name was Bob, and who had received the worst punishment.

From that day on there was war to the hilt between these two; and they showed it whenever they met. But Bill never would take the offensive, and Bob had learnt a lesson; so a long time elapsed before the enmity between them at last came to a head.

CHAPTER TWO

BILL ON THE HUNT FOR COYOTES

THE health of the smith's wife did not improve; the mountain air did not bring the expected results. So the doctor said that she must be taken home at once if there was anybody whom she wanted to see before it would be too late.

The smith then left camp in a hurry with his sick wife and the children, after selling whatever property he had to our building contractor. Bill and Dot naturally looked upon me as their master when the smith and his family had left. And the poodle, known as Curly, regarded itself as being my property in fee simple.

I had a good time with them that winter. Bill was always with me, and on my shorter trips I took the other two with me also.

It was very seldom that Bill barked; in camp he was very quiet. It was only when he saw a coyote that he relieved his feelings with some short and suppressed and very deep yelps.

In the night after the departure of the smith I was awakened by some dreadful howls coming from a considerable distance. At first I did not know what to make of it. The tone was too deep to come from the throat of any wild beast of the prairie.

It sounded more like the deep whistle of a siren on some steamer far away.

I got up to look into the matter; and I found Bill sitting on his tail at the place where the smith's tent had stood, howling a doleful farewell song.

I had much trouble in persuading him to hold his tongue. Later in the night I several times heard his sad plaint, and each time it was answered by the coyotes in the surrounding hills.

We had the best time when all three dogs followed me on a Sunday outing and they caught sight of a rabbit. All would go after it at their best speed. Curly would soon be left so far behind that it was entirely out of the race. Dot would keep it up a little farther and then come back for fear of getting lost in the heather. But Bill, who could run even faster than the rabbit, went like a black streak across the plain.

Every time he opened his jaws to snap at the posteriors of the rabbit this animal would jump suddenly to one side, so that Bill overshot the mark by twenty or thirty feet before he lost momentum and was able to stop. Then the chase began again; the rabbit repeating the former manoeuver, nearly always with the same result.

The greyhound does not have the instincts of a fighter; it is a hunter. When we were out together that winter hunting coyotes I saw many evidences of Bill's great talent.

In the chase a greyhound is guided by its keen eyes, not by its nose.

Whenever Bill saw a coyote he indulged himself

in a short, deep bark or two and erected the hairs of the neck, and his long limbs were like steel springs.

If I said: "At him, Bill," he went to his work with all the speed in him.

The coyote is itself a speedy beast; but unless it had a start of at least twenty rods Bill would catch it on the run.

All the coyotes that we saw this winter took to their heels when they caught sight of Bill. When he was after them they put their heart into it and scattered the miles behind them.

When the dog was going at top-notch speed, and I was at a place from which I could watch the race, I could see how steadily he gained on his quarry. When he had caught up with it he nipped the coyote's hinder end, always with the result that it made a couple of involuntary somersaults among the tufts of heather. When the coyote again was on its feet, and understood that it could not trust to its legs, it cleared the deck for action and made ready to fight.

It is characteristic of the greyhound that it will not attack an animal which is not running. The greyhound's one specialty is chasing everything that runs. It will hardly ever molest in any way an animal which stands still and looks at it. Such seems to be its nature.

So Bill would stand and look at the coyote; but he made no move to attack it, and so the battle never was fought.

There was much snow that winter; and so the

food was sparse for the large herds of cattle on the prairies.

It had happened several times that some of the half wild cattle had come in the night to our camp and helped themselves to the hay which I had provided for the horses. I built a barbed wire fence around the stacks, but it did not keep the famished cattle out.

Early one morning I found a number of cows in the hay. I was on my way to the stable to harness the team. "Bill," said I, "go and get them."

Now Bill had never in his life had to deal with cattle; but he was glad to do my bidding, and went to it at once and caught one of the cows by one of her hind legs.

This he should not have done; the cow did not like it. She jerked her leg loose and gave the dog a vicious kick.

Bill received the blow right in the face and yelped most piteously as he rolled over the ground. After that day I could not by any means induce him to go near a cow.

The dogs had been sleeping out of doors; but when the bitter cold of winter came upon us they tried in every way to get into the tent with us for the night. Some of the workmen insisted on turning them out in the evening. So one day I dug two holes down into the ground to serve as kennels, one for Bill and one for Curly. The doors were wooden frames with an opening protected by a flap of cloth, so that the dogs could go in and out as they pleased;

and the floors were covered with a deep layer of straw.

Dot slept in the bed with me like a quiet child on my arm. But the bed was so narrow that I was afraid of doing her some injury, so I fixed up for her a box with hay in it and found a place for it under my bed.

There she lay when we others turned in, and pretended to be sleeping; but whenever I woke up I found her with me under the blankets, and she would lie perfectly still for fear of being driven away. And when I spoke to her she always pretended to be sleeping.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SICKNESS OF LITTLE CURLY

SPRING came, and the snow was gone; but nothing had as yet begun to grow, and we still had many cold days.

The smith had been right in his prophesy that Dot never would be a large dog. She was now nearly full-grown, almost without having grown at all.

She was a trifle longer and taller than she had been, but had kept the slender build which had made her so unlike the usual pup.

In the springtime all nature is quickened, the joy of life grows more keen, and fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

For the first time the tender passion began to burn in Dot's young heart; and as she was the only dog in the neighborhood of the female persuasion, she had many wooers.

Dot was the innocent cause of many fights in these days. The bloodiest of them was the big battle between Bill and Bob; in which Bob was so badly whipped that for some days his owner expected him to die.

From her earliest puppyhood Bill had been Dot's protector; so now it was no more than fair that she in a way should belong to him.

He always had guarded her well, and now he guarded her even better. The other dogs in the camp had to be satisfied to look on from a distance while the two, with her in the lead, roamed the neighborhood together.

Bill had suddenly developed such an ugly temper that none of the other dogs dared to approach Dot.

The smallest of the male dogs in the camp was little Curly, and he also was the most handsome animal among them.

Dot and Curly had from the first been the best of friends. Curly was Dot's steady playmate, for Bill would seldom condescend to play. This may explain why Bill showed no disposition to be jealous of Curly, who was so little, and whom Bill probably never thought of as a possible rival.

Bill could not at this time be induced to go with me on my excursions. He would not leave Dot, but guarded her as a jealous lover might keep an eye on the object of his love.

Bill even deserted his kennel and slept outside of the opening to our tent. But curly also was now grown up. He was little and could not fight the big dogs, but he had as much brain as any in his little head.

The big dogs trusted in their physical prowess, something in which Curly knew that he could not compete with them. He had always been obliged to use cunning in order to hold his own and get his share of the good things of life; and so his brain had developed, while that of the larger animals may have been dormant.

One evening just before bedtime Curly was taken suddenly very ill. He shivered as with the chills, and there was a gurgling in his throat as with an attack of nausea.

This happened just outside of the opening into the tent, and just as I was going in for the night. I took him in my arms and carried him inside and laid him down on some sacks behind the stove.

Dot was in there already, and she now came and rubbed her muzzle lovingly against that of her playmate. But poor Curly was too sick to open his eyes. He lay still, caring not the least for Dot or anything else.

When I blew out the light and went to bed Dot was in her box under my bunk.

I woke up several times that night from hearing Bill prowling outside of the entrance, and I had to shout to him to be still. Strangely enough, for the first time since the habit was established, Dot did not sleep on my arm.

The sickness of Curly did not last long. In the morning he seemed to be nearly all right; but in the evening he again lay outside of the entrance to the tent suffering awful agony.

Then suddenly the truth dawned on me. Curly had outwitted us all. For the sake of keeping the strain as nearly pure as possible I had wanted Dot to remain faithful to Bill only; but Curly had fooled me into helping him in the carrying out of his plans. I had myself shut out Bill, who could so easily have put his rival to rout.

When spring came our camp grew larger in the

number of people and other animals. Some of the families had poultry, the contractor had a fat hog; and shortly before this a brindled cat had appeared on the scene, coming from nobody knew where.

Poor little Dot. She began to be heavy and have a subdued air. She would not often play with me, as had been her habit. Much of the time she stood looking at me, her bright eyes dimmed with unwept tears.

As her time drew near I made her a comfortable kennel, where she might have undisturbed privacy if she so desired.

I hoped that Dot's pups would be greyhounds. She was half greyhound herself; and so the pups, tho not quite pure, might become valuable animals. However, when they came one night I made a discovery which to me was something new. Four of the eight pups were greyhounds, and the other four were poodles.

Dot seemed very happy at this time. The building contractor aforesaid wanted to kill the pups; there were too many dogs in the camp already. But I persuaded him to let me keep two of the newcomers, a greyhound which I wanted for my own, and a poodle which I wished to keep for a time as a matter of curiosity. It would be interesting to watch the growth of these two widely different pups belonging to the same litter.

I had expected that the cat would be the one female in the camp who would not help to increase the population. The nearest farms were several miles

away, and the wild animals of the prairie were dangerous to cats.

But I had reckoned wrong; love surmounts all obstacles. Not long after Dot's confinement the cat also began to show signs of soon becoming a mother.

Dot and the cat, with the pups and the kittens, dwelt together that summer as one happy family. Often the puppies pushed their way under the cat, where they even tried to take refreshment. And Dot was as watchful of the kittens as of her own progeny.

One day I noticed that Curly was fast growing altogether too fat. I was aware that dogs might put on a deal of flesh in an incredibly short time. But Curly overdid it; and when some of the families that had chickens complained of the mysterious disappearance of the eggs—tho the shells always remained—I began to harbor a slight suspicion that Curly might be a thief.

And this was soon shown to be the case; and the rightful owners of the stolen eggs came to me with complaints, and then with threats.

It is claimed to be impossible to cure a dog of stealing eggs. I do not know if this is true; but rather than have anybody kill poor Curly I gave him to a man who happened to come driving that way.

Late in the summer we had finished our work, and people were leaving the place.

The greyhound pup—my pup—was at this time at least twice as big as the poodle.

The contractor did not want any of the dogs except Bill, who was worth some money. I secured for Dot and her poodle pup a good home with some people on a farm, with whom I had become acquainted when I was hauling hay.

I shall not forget the day on which I left Dot at her new home; how piteously she whined, and how reproachfully her bright, almost human, eyes looked at me for the last time as I drove away.

Many times since have I seen these eyes in my thoughts and dreams. Even now after many years I can see them looking at me with loyal faith, whenever I sit alone and close my own eyes. And I feel a sting of the old pain which I felt then, something which clutches at my heart.

Still, I had the comfort of knowing that Dot and her pup had come into the hands of people who would always deal gently with them.

The contractor had kept the big greyhound only to make some money out of it. A farmer down by the river, who spent his winters as a hunter and trapper, had often seen Bill; and learning that he was now for sale, came promptly and bought him.

But it was not so easy to persuade Bill to leave us and go to another home. He absolutely refused to follow when the farmer who had bought him rode away. Not even the chain around his neck could induce him to come on. He struggled violently, lay down flat on the ground, and showed his teeth when the new owner came near him.

So we agreed to deliver the dog at the farm on the following day; and as Bill would not go with

"NERO"

anybody but me it devolved on me to do the delivering.

I did this duty with a heavy heart. I was so fond of Bill that to part with him was like parting with a beloved friend.

At the farmer's place he followed me into the stable; and there we shut him in, while I galloped home.

The farm was at some considerable distance from our camp. But the wind that night was from the west, and it carried to my ears the wailing of the greyhound—the same piteous wailing which I had heard on that moonlit night when Bill sat at the place where the smith's tent had stood, and gave vent to his grief over losing his old master. And when night now came, and the wind sighed sadly across the prairie, I again heard Bill's mournful baying.

It was so hard for poor Bill to reconcile himself to a new master and a new home. He had reached the age when any radical change is almost intolerable. So he now sat in his prison and howled his feelings out into the night.

A long time after this I was told that the greyhound had run away from the trapper, who was said to be cruel toward animals. The greyhound was not a dog toward which one could be cruel and at the same time remain its master. It could not be ruled by force. It wanted to love and to be loved.

CHAPTER FOUR

NERO

WHEN I went away I took the greyhound pup with me. I stopped some days in a little mining town, to rest up and to decide just what I wanted to do during the remainder of the fall season.

In this town I fell in with a man whom I knew, by profession a gold-miner and trapper. He was in town to buy some provisions, and was going back next day to the place where he was washing gold out of the sandy banks of the river.

He was alone, and would like to have somebody with him; and except for the puppy I was alone also. So I went with the man. Not that I had much faith in gold hunting in this part of the country, but that this free life in the open appealed to me.

It took us three days to reach his camp; which was on the banks of a river, at the entrance to a canon some forty or fifty miles long, carved out by the river thru the mountains.

It was a wild and picturesque place. The river roared thru the canon; between walls which at some places rise straight up, and at other places even lean out over the chasm; which in the evening shadows are dark and threatening, and which tower high toward the heavens.

Along these fifty miles of river and canon there was a great variety in the scenery. At some points in the dark mountain the chasm widened; and there the river flowed noiselessly, and friendly little islands had lifted themselves out of the water. There were grass and bushes and trees on the slopes which the sun could reach; and the wild grandeur of it all was relieved by places of surpassing loveliness.

In this canon my friend Bart Niland had spent five years of his life. Here he had in the summer been panning gold with varying success; and thru the long winter he had hunted and trapped game, all alone with his ponies and his dog.

To a dweller in the cities such a life may seem unendurable, but not to them that have tried it. A few years spent in the loneliness of the wide prairies teach one to be alone without being lonesome.

Loneliness broods over everything out there; over the long, hot days, when the sun bakes the dry, gray earth; over the friendly, moonlit evenings; over the stormy nights of winter and the starry nights of autumn.

This loneliness has put its stamp on everything, even on the fauna and the flora of the region.

Here and there on the banks of some ravine or dry creek a lone tree tries to extract some nourishment out of the meager soil; here and there skulks some lonely beast of prey. Up against the blue sky is sometimes seen a black spot: a hawk or a falcon or an eagle sailing majestically thru space

under the everchanging but always lonely heaven above the prairie.

And from some place, coming out of the black night, may be heard the low and weird hooting of a solitary owl.

In these surroundings my greyhound puppy grew up, ate itself nearly to death whenever occasion offered, and was more trouble than help when I took it with me out hunting. But I wanted it to learn something of the work which probably would be the business of its life. I tried hard to teach it, but it showed a most surprising disinclination to learn anything. As it grew larger it became self-conscious and more self-willed. Its temper was very uncertain. In appearance it was much like its sire, tho its nose may not have been quite so long and pointed. It had the human and intelligent looking eyes of its mother.

The mother being such a little animal one would expect the pup also to be of diminutive size; but in this instance the law of heredity seemed to have slipped a cog. Nature presented to us one of her frequent but incomprehensible exceptions. For the pup was even now almost as large as its father; and there was nothing to suggest that the animal intended to stop growing.

For speed it was a wonder, tho the long legs still had something of the pup's clumsiness. Its appetite was like the appetite of a hired man.

I remember a certain day on which Niland was repairing a rifle that had not been in use for many years.

In the evening, as the sun went down, at a time when the rabbit usually crouches under the heather and nibbles at the grass, we went outside to try the rifle.

Hunting rabbits was the favorite sport of the pup; and with much patience and some use of the rod I had been able to make it understand, that when I had shot a rabbit this belonged to me and not to the pup, at any rate not till I said so.

This evening we had not gone far before we saw a rabbit under a tuft of heather. Niland took a shot at it. The old rifle had a big bore, while the rabbit was a small specimen of the tribe. It was thrown a dozen feet into the air and came down again as a mere bloody mass. In a few seconds the pup had reached the place. The rabbit had been torn into shreds; the bullet had been too large and the distance too small.

The pup at first stood looking longingly at the delicacy and then inquiringly at me.

"You may take it," said I; wondering what it would do with something which looked so disgusting. However, it must have looked to Nero like a thing to tempt the appetite; for in a moment he had it between his teeth, shook it a little so that the loose earth fell off it, jerked it up by a turn of his neck, opened his mouth to the ears, and quickly swallowed the whole thing, fur and flesh and blood and bones.

Niland and I could not help admiring his appetite and the perfection of his digestive apparatus.

There are on the prairies two species of rabbits.

The larger is like the common hare of northern Europe; while the other is a wild cony, of about the same size as the tame rabbit, and of a gray color.

The large kind always trusts to its legs, and does not look for a burrow in which to hide. The small kind is less confident of being able to run away from its enemy. It always sets out with great speed when pursued by a dog, but it makes use of the first opportunity to hide in some burrow. If there is none such conveniently near at hand, or the rabbit is too much disturbed in its mind to be able to find one, it usually will be caught and killed by the fleet-footed dog.

My pup had soon discovered these facts. He had been roaming the prairies alone, the same as his father did before him; and many a rabbit that was nibbling at its evening meal had lost its life to appease Nero's miraculous appetite.

If it seemed to him that we did not treat him with fairness at mealtime, he would go out. He never stood there like a sneaking beggar as dogs commonly do; his inherited pride would not let him do it. He went out and ate the food he himself could provide.

The sire had been a dog of few words, but Nero was boisterous; tho he did not run around and bark at everything and at nothing as so often is the case with watchdogs.

This comparative taciturnity may have been due to the fact that there was little to bark at; Nero might have been noisy like the others had he grown up on a farm with living things all about him.

As it was he seemed to emulate the only animals of his kind in these parts. For when the sharp call of the coyote was heard in the evening, Nero always answered in the deep bass which he had inherited from his sire.

He was the only dog within a circuit of some miles, the nearest farm being about four miles from our camp.

Want of companionship will in due time make a man morose and odd; and no doubt the same thing holds good in the case of other animals. It is probable that when Nero barked and howled in answer to the coyote he did it merely to be sociable; for there was nothing in his appearance or tone to suggest any hostility. And when at night he barked at the moon, the barking no doubt expressed his loneliness; it was a crying want which he lulled to sleep with a song.

The pup had grown up without a name; but of course he must have one, and I had now begun to call him Nero.

From his birth he had been sleeping out of doors. When the long and cold nights of early winter came upon us, with snow in the mountains, and the north wind began to howl, it seemed to me that Nero's shorthaired and smooth fur looked pretty thin. So one night when the weather was unusually cold I did not turn him out of doors, as I had been in the habit of doing, before going to bed.

For an hour or two he made no noise, presumably because he heard none. Near midnight I woke up and did not at once go to sleep again. I was

lying there listening to the north wind among the trees outside, to its monotonous whistling over the plains, and to the peaceful breathing of my chum and of Nero.

Then I heard the cry of a coyote thru the night. It came from far away and was but faintly audible, but it reached the sharp ears of Nero. His regular breathing ceased. Another dog might have growled and then fallen asleep again; but not so with Nero.

First I heard that he was trying to get out. He scratched at the door; and when this did not do any good he came over to me where I lay, and sniffed at my face and rubbed his nose against mine.

I pretended to be asleep. Nero went to the door again. I heard him scratching at the woodwork; he whined and he begged. Several times he came back to me, pulled at the blankets, and repeatedly gave me a pretty hard blow with his paw. When I still pretended to be asleep he went to Niland, who really was sleeping soundly.

Nero grew more and more uneasy, and began to whine loudly; and when another coyote near by answered the howl of the first one, Nero joined in the chorus with his deep roar till the flimsy cabin trembled and the startled Niland came near falling out of bed.

I made haste to let Nero out in order to save him from the kick which he would surely have received if Niland had been quick enough.

This was the first time that I had taken Nero into the house at night, and it was also the last. If I later on tried to get him to come in of an evening

when there was a storm, he would come as far as the door, but no farther. That is, in the evening; he was often in the house during the day.

Nero was most uncommonly sensitive. He had often shown this even as a young puppy. If it happened that we were angry and talked to him in a harsh tone, he took offence and went away.

He might then stay away for hours, and sometimes the whole day. At other times he kept near by us, but pretended neither to see nor hear us if we said anything to him; he ignored us completely, and usually we needed to use our very best diplomacy in order to win back his good will.

Nero had occasion at an early age to learn what a gun was.

In order to teach him to keep behind me till after the report when we were hunting rabbits, I had a few times fired the gun close to him. The effect of the shot on the rabbit had soon taught Nero to keep in the rear. I had a few times pointed the gun at him, merely in fun. If there then was anything to get behind he got behind it in a hurry; and if there was no such shelter he simply shut his eyes. He seemed to regard that as his last chance. It was impossible to induce him to look into the muzzle of a gun.

We had in our camp a pair of monstrous hogs. One was a great fat sow of which Niland had become owner when she was quite little. Afterward he had bought a boar to keep her company. This boar was very large and had a very choleric temper.

Once when I went down to the river for a pail

of water the boar attacked me. I struck at him with all my strength with the full pail and hit him squarely in the snout. The sound of the blow was such that for a moment it caused me to pity the beast; I thought that I might have been too rough with it.

But the boar did not seem to mind it in the least. I looked at the pail and saw the reason why. The boar had received the blow on his two great fangs; and in the pail were two holes thru which I could stick one of my fingers.

From the first day this boar was Nero's enemy. Nero was in the habit of taking a nap after dinner. He sought a quiet patch of sunshine near the house in order to enjoy a peaceful siesta.

But as soon as he had settled himself comfortably the boar would come and disturb him, grunting his hated grunt into the dog's face and pushing at him with his abominable snout.

And big and strong tho he was, Nero could do nothing worse than to watch his chance to bite his teeth into the boar's ear.

To show how helpless the dog was as against this monster of a hog I must relate this incident:

Niland had a colt which came home one day from the ravine with a broken leg. He took his rifle and put the colt out of misery. With the two ponies we dragged the carcass to a hollow a hundred yards or so from the house. Next day, just as the coyotes were singing good-night to the setting sun, we heard an unusual noise from the direction of that hollow.

Niland and I were in the stable, and we hurried over there to see what the trouble was.

There stood the boar making his supper off the carcass; at the same time fighting off two big coyotes that had been called to the place by the smell of it and also wanted their supper.

Whenever they came too near the boar made a sortie; and they had enough discretion to keep out of the way of the boar's wicked looking fangs.

When these two robbers of the prairie did not dare to try conclusions with the boar, did not have the courage to dispute his right to that supper; what could be expected of a dog which was little more than a pup?

So there was nothing else for Nero to do than to go his way when the pesky boar came. But Nero did not like thus to be under the necessity of surrendering his right to liberty of action. It hurt his natural pride, and so he hated that hog with a most bitter hatred.

Winter came early that year and was very severe. There was ice along the banks of the river, and in the mountains it was bitter cold. The canon was empty and dead.

I had spent the two previous winters out there in the wilds. I felt a keen longing for a change, but could not readily come to a decision as to the place where I wanted to spend the winter.

I was lying awake one night thinking of this matter. There was a strong wind from the north with snow and sleet. The storm came howling out

of the ravine, and sighed heavily over the wide plains.

To the ear it was a gripping drama, somber enough to be almost a tragedy. And while I lay there that night listening to the soughing of the stormwinds there came upon me an overpowering impulse to get away, back to my fellows; back to civilization, from which I had so long been absent.

I loved the prairies and the mountain and the forest, in their bright summer dress and in the somber garments of autumn, as tenderly as these natural solitudes ever have been loved by any man. But my young blood demanded a change. The life over on the farther side of the horizon was calling and beckoning—and it is not good for man always to be alone.

So I left Niland and Nero to the winter and the loneliness, and went away to satisfy my wanderlust and seek my Eldorado in some other place.

The life history of Nero from that time on I record as it was told me by Niland when several years later I met him again.

CHAPTER FIVE

NERO IN THE ROLE OF PEACEMAKER

NILAND and Nero spent all that winter by themselves. From the time when I left and until the time in the spring when they went to town with the load of furs, and to buy a stock of provisions, they did not once see a human being, nor did Nero see any other dog.

In the meantime Nero had grown big and strong; a handsome greyhound, whose mixed blood only gave him a more powerful body. He was a dog that would have attracted attention anywhere, but especially out there where coyote and wolf dogs were in such great demand.

In the town were many ranchmen, gold miners, trappers, and farmers. Most of them were there on the same business as was Niland. All had money, and all were disposed to amuse themselves a little after the long winter. Niland declined many good offers for his dog.

The visit to the town was a welcome change for Nero also. He had been alone all winter, and now spring had come. Suddenly he felt a new and strange interest, a strong desire for the company of other dogs.

They stayed in town a matter of four days. When they were well started for home, where

neither of them could expect to see one of his own kind before they went back to town in the fall, they stopped for some minutes and took a look back at the place.

There is a certain sadness in it when one thus starts out to spend another half year by himself after a short stay in town—no matter how often one may have done it before.

Niland felt it, tho he always had led this kind of a life. The dog felt it also, now that he was going away from those of his kind which he had met. He had spent happy hours with them, and would miss them at the lonely camp.

After such trips to town it always would take some days to accommodate one's self again to the life of the camp.

Niland was a great reader. He always brought with him from the town a mass of reading matter; and so Nero was for some days left almost entirely to his own devices. His mortal enemy, the boar, was no longer there; and so he could not even amuse himself with an occasional sortie against that beast. He took care of himself, ate and drank, and did as he pleased. In the evenings, when the coyotes paid their tribute to the setting sun, Nero always joined in with them. And instead of being harsh and defiant, as is usual with dogs, his tone was almost friendly; and he showed no sign of being angry during these daily concerts. His howl was the outpouring of a lonely heart longing for life and companionship.

Nero was the image of his father; from his

mother he could not have inherited anything but his friendly disposition.

The father of Nero never attacked a coyote; he caught it on the run, nipped it a little in the rump so that it tumbled down, and thus delayed it until the hunter came and ended its life.

In this respect Nero was quite different. Tho of an evening he howled in concert with the coyotes without any signs of enmity, he would when on the hunt attack them with ungovernable fury.

If he could avoid it without turning tail the father never would fight with other dogs. The son of this aristocrat of dogdom had never, while he was with me, had any opportunity to show just what he might do in an affair of this kind. But there was a case in point the following summer.

Forty or fifty miles to the east there was an Indian reservation. One day that summer a whole band of Indians came by with their tepees, their ponies and dogs; and in the evening they made their camp down by the river not far from Niland's cabin.

Niland made use of this chance to talk with somebody, even tho the somebody was only an Indian; and Indians are not noted for their talkativeness when in the company of the whites.

Nero was with his master on this occasion, but showed unexpected reserve. He sat or lay looking carelessly at the little and plebeian Indian dogs as if not seeing them, or at any rate as if taking no interest in them and the insolent curiosity with which they regarded him. The Indians always have many dogs; and a majority of these are quarrelsome and

impertinent. These mongrels were strongly inclined to make common cause and attack Nero. Their noses told them that he also was a dog, tho he was so different from them in appearance.

However, nothing came of it; somebody kept the dogs back. But to satisfy their craving the curs started a fight among themselves. Two of the largest among them engaged in battle close to the place where Nero was sitting.

He remained sitting for a time as a neutral spectator. But for some reason the fight did not seem to meet his views in regard to propriety. He got up slowly, went slowly over to them, caught first one and then the other of the combatants firmly by the scruff of the neck, as if to teach them better manners, and then threw them violently to the ground on either side. Then he went away as deliberately as he had come, and lay down again.

Shortly afterward he closed his eyes and stretched his long body on the warm earth, seemingly with no inkling of the curiosity which he had awakened.

CHAPTER SIX

NERO AND THE RATTLESNAKE

OUT in the wilds is an animal, a crawling viper, which all other denizens of the prairie, even the bravest, shun and fear; and this crawling thing is the rattlesnake.

A horse may be coming along, with or without a rider. It makes a sudden jump to the side; and if there be a rider who is not on his guard, the jump may have serious consequences. The horse was startled by hearing the peculiar, dry noise made by a rattlesnake.

Or a flock of sheep may be eating their lazy way over the prairie on a warm day. Suddenly there is an opening in the middle of the bunch, the frightened sheep run wildly in all directions; and one may be sure that a rattlesnake has been in evidence.

So it is with the wolf, the dog, the coyote, and with man; all fear and shun this pernicious reptile.

Or nearly all. There was an exception, Nero. To be sure, he also jumped to one side when his ears told him that there was a rattler near by. But as soon as he saw the reptile there was another story. Niland had been the owner of many dogs of many kinds; but Nero was the only one of them who would attack a rattlesnake. When Niland for the first time saw him do it he laid it, of course, to the

young pup's lack of sense. And Niland did his best to teach the dog to be afraid; tho he saw that his teaching was ignored. So at last he let Nero do as he liked.

Niland could not help but admire Nero's courage when for the first time he saw the dog kill a rattlesnake. Nero went close to it; so close that Niland every moment expected him to be bitten. The snake had but to strike; the slightest touch would mean death. But Nero was always out of reach when the snake made the attack. He had his own system of blocking every play. He watched his chance, caught the snake just back of the head, and the fight was over.

One day Niland found the hole of a pair of coyotes over among the hills. Next day he came back to dig them out. Nero was out on one of his excursions and did not come with him.

It was in the morning. Just as Niland caught sight of the burrow he saw the mother coyote leaving it with something between her teeth. She was moving, and was carrying one of her cubs. In some way she had found out that her home had been discovered by the enemy which she most feared. So she was moving her young to another and safer place.

But Niland had seen that at least one of the cubs still was there. It stood at the entrance looking after its mother; but when Niland came nearer it slid back into the burrow.

It was the only one left of the cubs, a little and frightened female, which closed its eyes and trem-

bled when he took hold of it. The mother had carried the others to their new home and would, of course, have come back for this last one had she been given time enough.

Niland did not want to kill the little thing; he took it to his cabin and tried to make it eat something.

When Nero came home, and the infant coyote was held before his eyes, Niland was surprised to see the gentleness of the dog. Nero examined the little one with unspeakable wonder in his serious eyes. He poked carefully at it with his nose, and sniffed at the whole little body in order thoroly to satisfy his curiosity.

During this examination the coyote made itself as little as possible, trembling with fear of this big animal which was so like and so unlike the coyote mother.

Before long the two were good friends. The cub missed the brothers and sisters, and could not long resist the friendliness of Nero.

Niland turned a big box into a house for the cub, and fastened the animal to it with a strong strap around the neck.

The severe winter came early that year. Cattle and sheep sought their food down on the low lands, and found but little of it.

These great herds and flocks are never given any hay if they can by any possibility do without it. But if the winter is unusually severe and long the owners are sometimes obliged to give them hay in order to keep them alive till the grass comes.

Niland had a small stack of wild hay, put up in the summer for his ponies.

When the time of famine was on them this stack of hay proved a strong temptation to a herd of cows that thru the whole autumn had kept themselves in this neighborhood.

The cows were already so starved that it was pitiful; and when they one moon-lit night in sheer desperation made an assault on the stack of hay, Niland was not able to drive them back.

The coyotes had begun to follow these cattle day and night; at some distance to be sure, but still near enough to be promptly on hand when a starved cow gave it up and lay down to die. Coyotes never attack a full-grown cow before hunger or disease has made her harmless.

But when she is in her last throes, and has been left behind by the other cows, the coyotes can be relied on to come and make an end of her suffering.

While Niland was doing his best to keep the cows away from his hay, the coyote sat near, egging them on with its weird howling to go at it with even still more reckless abandon. The situation was not amusing; and was made worse by the absence of the one and only Nero, who might have been of some assistance to Niland at this juncture.

Niland had trained the dog to come when he gave a shrill whistle with two fingers in his mouth. By this means he could call the dog from a considerable distance, especially on windless nights.

And now that Niland so sorely needed the animal's help to protect his valuable hay, he whistled

a call of distress which was like the blast of a siren thru the still moonlight.

This startling whistle made the coyotes keep their peace; it was something so new and strange to them. But far out on the prairie was one who heard and understood. That he must obey this call was something which had been deeply dented into the brain of Nero. He knew that he was to come at once to Niland, the one man whom he knew and loved. And he showed his loyalty by dropping all other business and coming as fast as he could.

It did not take him long. He reached the place at the very time when Niland was in greatest danger of being trodden under foot by the wildly excited cows. Nero knew no more about cows than his father had known; and the adventure which Bill had with them was now repeated, Nero doing exactly what Bill had done.

With a growl he rushed in and fastened his teeth in the leg of the nearest cow; and she acted just like the cow on which Bill had made his attack. Bill had received a kick which for all time cured him of the desire to hunt cows. In the same way Nero received a blow on the head which sent him rolling over and over on the snow.

So far it was the same old story. Experience does it, as they say; but experience is sometimes an expensive teacher.

In the case of Bill experience had taught him nothing more than the simple lesson, that he would better keep away from cows. He was at the time

getting on in years; and it is hard, we know, to teach an old dog new tricks.

Now, whether it was Nero's youth or the inheritance from his mother's side of the family, or solely the influence of the wild environment, may be an open question; but when Nero scrambled to his feet he was furious whether or no, and returned to the attack on the cow that had kicked him. He now had learned to keep out of the way of her hind feet.

The battle raged fast and furious. The cow was outclassed and soon admitted defeat; and tried to get to a safe distance where the other cows would cover her retreat.

But Nero was now so angry that all cows were alike to him; he resolutely went after any that crossed his path. He indulged in assault and battery to the extent that the cows at last got together in regular formation, with horns toward the outside, just as they do when attacked by wolves.

No matter against what point Nero now directed his attack, he found it defended by sharp and long horns, and for a moment this confused him. But his blood was at the boiling-point, and he had no thought of quitting before his work was done. He ran around the ring once or twice looking for an opening. When he found none he did not hesitate to adopt the plan of the wolf in a case of this kind. He took a good start and made a flying leap, landing with a roar on a cow in the very heart of the bunch. She went mad with fright and started to run for her life; and the ring was broken up into a number of panic-stricken cows running wildly in all di-

rections. Nero followed in pursuit for some distance over the moon-lit prairie, until his mighty voice barely reached the ear of his master.

After thirty minutes or so he came back; perfectly calm as if nothing had happened. He went to the stable, not expecting or caring to be thanked and caressed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NERO, THE YOUNG COYOTE, AND THE WOLFHOUND

LIKE all dogs Nero had the habit of burying in the earth any food left over from his meals; in order to dig it out and eat it later on when he was hungry.

When he had brought in some delicacy, usually a rabbit, he would eat as much of it as he could outside of the door, and then bury whatever was left over.

But after the young female coyote came into his life he changed this habit and never buried any food.

Now when he had any such delicacy, he always put it down where the young coyote could get at it. The two ate together; and when Nero had eaten what he wanted, he left the rest of the food to his little lady friend.

She was growing to be a fine, big animal, and she needed more food all the time. Niland often was absent, sometimes for the whole day. But no matter where he was or how long he stayed, the coyote suffered no want; Nero brought her something to eat every day.

Was there a purpose in this, or was it merely a habit which Nero had contracted thru eating together with the coyote?

Like all others of her kind, this coyote howled when the sun went down, in answer to the howls of the other coyotes over on the hills.

Niland had tried to cure her of this habit, generally by throwing something at her whenever she began. By this means he could teach her not to howl, but could not teach her to forget. During the day she usually remained quietly in her box—or it might be outside of it if the weather was favorable—excepting at the times when Nero visited her. Then she showed her pleasure by wagging her handsome, bushy tail. But in the evening she always found it hard to keep from answering the call of the other coyotes out of the twilight. This concert as a rule made her forget both herself and Niland, and she would make as if to join in the chorus; but Niland's harsh voice would silence her at once and cause her to sneak with a shame-faced air back into her box.

Thru all her puppyhood she had been a prisoner at the end of a chain, but this did not dull the edge of her keen wish to be free. She had tried to free herself by every means at her command. The bright chain had marks on it to show that she had not spared her teeth during the quiet nights; and her tracks, when there had been a fall of snow, showed how she had chafed to be able to make a dash for liberty. But nothing had come of it. The one thing on which she might have used her teeth with the desired result was out of their reach—the leather strap around her neck.

One day an old trapper, a friend of Niland's,

came by, having a pair of dogs with him. One of these was merely a common mongrel, while the other was a valuable Russian wolfhound. This animal was taller and longer than Nero, tho not quite so sturdy in build.

As soon as this dog caught sight of the coyote he flew at her and would no doubt have killed her then and there, had not her faithful friend and supporter, Nero, been there to prevent it. The battle was fast and furious. They stood up on their hind legs, they rolled over and over on the ground, howled and growled and snarled. The uproar was deafening.

Niland wanted to stop it at once, but thought better of it when the other man coldly remarked: "Oh, let them have a little fun." Niland could see that the wolfhound was a good and trained fighter; but so was Nero also. When out hunting he had often killed a coyote as if it were a rat, without receiving as much as a scratch.

The wolfhound and the greyhound have much in common. They are built on the same plan; but the wolfhound has long hair, while the greyhound has a smooth fur. In a fight they use the same tactics, like a wolf and the coyote; they snap and tear at each other. They never take hold and hang on like the bulldog.

But Nero was not a thorobred greyhound. Nobody knew what his maternal grandsire had been.

Be this as it may. Nero would sometimes bite and hold on. Niland had often seen him do it when fighting with a coyote. Nero would fasten his

fangs in the throat of the enemy, and usually the fight was then soon ended.

Now the two brutes fought in about the same way. They kept it up with undiminishing fury, frothing at the mouth and with eyes flashing fire.

It had been a pretty even fight; no great advantage on either side. But Nero seemed as strong as ever on the offensive, while the wolfhound showed signs of weakening. Then, when both were down, the wolfhound suddenly lay still on its back with Nero's teeth fastened to its throat.

Nero had at last secured the hold for which he had been trying from the start; the deadly hold which would in a few seconds have finished the wolfhound if Niland had not come to the rescue and forced Nero to let go.

The wolfhound crawled away and lay down, licking its wounds. It knew that it was whipped. Nero went over and sniffed at the coyote, which from the door of the kennel had watched the whole proceeding.

The old trapper understood dogs. He saw that Nero was just what he wanted, and he offered Niland an unheard of price for the animal. But Niland shook his head; Nero was not for sale.

In the latter part of the winter, or early spring, both the dog and the chained coyote were in a very uneasy mood. Nero made too liberal use of his liberty. He was gone all night, and sometimes all day. When the coyotes howled in the evening he would join in with them from a hill back of the

cabin, and his deep voice sounding like the rumbling of thunder.

At this season the dog was half wild, extremely unmanageable. Niland often had to point the rifle at him in order to induce him to stop his nerve-racking howling from the hilltop.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A FIGHT IN THE DARK

THE coyote was but little better than Nero. Niland could silence her by throwing something at her, or by shouting to her; but as soon as he turned his back on her, the warning was forgotten. When she heard a howl she answered it, and kept it up till Niland's voice frightened her into holding her tongue.

Her howls woke him up many times every night.

One morning when Niland came out Nero was lying outside of the coyote's kennel licking the many bloody wounds with which he was covered. When spoken to he wagged his tail, but his eyes flashed fire; and when the touch of the tongue caused his wounds to smart, as happened now and then, bringing back to his mind the night's adventures, he uttered some threatening growls.

That night Niland shut Nero into the barn; but his howling later on became so intolerable that there was nothing for it but to get up and let him out. He licked his master's hand briefly and gratefully, and then vanished into the darkness. After a time his voice was heard from far away. Presumably he was hurling defiance at the enemy, or the enemies, that on the previous night had given him such rough

treatment. His challenge was replied to, the howls of the coyotes coming to him from every hand.

Next morning he again lay outside near the kennel. The old wounds were beginning to heal, and there were no new ones. The wild gleam in his eyes was gone, and he wagged his tail in most friendly fashion.

Some drops of blood and a yellow-gray tuft of hair sticking to him at a place where he could not get at it with his tongue told the story. He had avenged the defeat of the previous night.

Then one day the spring came in good earnest. The grass put its fine feelers up out of the ground to try the warmth in the air. The trees down by the river began to bud, and the snow was retreating up the side of the mountain. The call of the wild was stilled; and the life of dog and coyote ran smoothly in the beaten path.

All day the coyote would lie in the sun outside of her kennel, almost without moving. In the night it was another story. Then her chain rattled unceasingly from twilight till dawn.

It was near the time when Niland must make his trip to town. The larder was nearly empty. But what to do with the coyote? Should he turn her loose? He did not like to do this; for he was sure that she was to have a litter of cubs, and he wanted very much to see them.

However, some days later Nero solved the problem for him.

When Niland came out in the morning the coyote was not there. The chain was still fastened to the

kennel, but the heavy leather strap that had encircled her neck had been bitten thru by Nero's sharp teeth.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LONE TRAPPER

ONE day that summer the old trapper again came by. Like Niland he was a lonely man, usually in the service of the big cattle companies; for he was known far and wide for his skill in exterminating beasts of prey.

He was a man in good repute. But he had one periodical weakness, of which nothing could cure him.

He was a drinking man, but not a steady tippler like certain men in the cities. He did not drink every day. The drinking men of the prairies are not of that kind. They get drunk a couple of times a year, when they make their spring and fall trips to town to replenish their stock of provisions.

This man might stay drunk all the time for a week or two. Whether it were to be one or two depended mostly on the state of his finances. When he had "gone thru his pile"—his wages, perhaps, for a whole year's work—he would get his team and dogs and disappear as quietly as he had come. Then he would drive back over the wide plain, following the lonely trail bordered with tufts of heather; back to the wilds, where there was nothing but the howling of the coyotes from the hills to break the solemn stillness.

The trapper was now on his way to town, where he would for a week or two lie around in a frightfully dissolute state. He disappeared among the hillocks just as the sun appeared above the eastern hills. Niland could for some time see the light reflected from the yellow raincoat, which was rolled up and tied to the saddle. This was the last seen of him; the sun, and the heather waving in the gentle breeze, had swallowed him.

In this way the trapper went to town when the big thirst came upon him, once or twice or three times a year. And in this way he comes back when his old carcass is saturated with dissipation. In this way he has lived since his locks were golden, until now when they are whitened with old age. Always alone with his dogs and ponies, in sunshine and rain, summer and winter; a loneliness which must be experienced to be understood.

And in this way he will live till life's bitter end. He is a desert rat, a lone animal who, faithful to the traditions of his tribe will be found dead—having died as he lived in the wilds which at first he may have dreaded, but which he afterward, as he learned to know them better, came to love more and more. Then himself became a part of this nature, melting into nothingness in the midst of the solitude.

CHAPTER TEN

THREE TO ONE

IN THE spring three brothers had taken up their residence at a place farther down the ravine. They were three quarrelsome brutes, who had been many times in the clutches of the law. Niland had met them a couple of times; once when he was out looking for a lost horse. At the time when this industry was in bloom they had made for themselves a pretty far-flung reputation as horse-thieves.

So Niland had good reason for it when he went that way to look for his horse. And this time he had Nero with him.

As compared with other animals, hogs were at the time a great rarity in these parts.

The three brothers had a pair of big hogs, one a sow with a litter of pigs.

One of the hogs was impertinent to Nero. Now, Nero had probably not seen any hogs since the time of the boar that was the torment of his puppyhood. He may have forgotten all about hogs; but this impertinence on the part of the strange brute had no doubt jogged his recollection of the early days. At any rate the hair of his neck now stood on end, he bared his teeth, and growled a deep challenge.

The distance between the camp of Niland and

that of the brothers was not great, but the road was almost impassable.

However, the first time that Nero saw those hogs was not to be the last time, as it happened. The sheep were up among the mountains, and the rabbits were not easily caught; but the hogs—how Nero did remember and hate these grunting, filthy, fat monsters that impertinently poked their snouts into everything they saw.

One day Niland went out to get a prairie hen for his supper, and he and Nero found themselves near a bunch of ponies not far from the camp of the brothers.

Niland thought it time to give up the hunt and go home. But when Nero had caught the scent of the ponies he stopped short and by his actions insisted that Niland must come and look at them.

And sure enough; in the bunch stood his own pony for which he had been looking, his pet pony, Topsy.

The other ponies moved some steps away, but Topsy remained where she was. She knew her owner and willingly followed him when he took her by the forelock and led her home.

It goes without saying that the brothers after this hated Niland most cordially. Horse-stealing was not in good repute at the time. When the authorities had caught a horse-thief they made an example of him in order to discourage the nefarious business.

Niland noticed that Nero took a new course when starting out in the evening to make a night of it.

Instead of roaming the prairie he went down the dark ravine. This was a mystery to Niland, until one of the brothers came riding one day and threatened him with a violent death if he did not keep his dog at home in the night. On the night before this Nero had, it appeared, killed one of the large hogs and several of the small pigs.

There was no possibility of a mistake; the man had seen the thing with his own eyes, and would have shot Nero dead had the brute not been so infernally quick to get away.

Niland could do nothing but offer the man proper compensation, and promise for the future to keep his dog at home. He knew that these jail birds would kill him with as little compunction as that with which they would kill his dog.

The place was far out from the settlements, and in a general way there was but little respect for the law.

Niland was not timid, but he was a man of peace. He had more than once had to do with such men as these. And in the course of the years he had made for himself a high reputation as a good shot. It was said that no matter how fast the deer might run his rifle would bring it down. But withal he was a man of character and of much reading; a man who believed in law and order, a lover of animals, a child of nature; but a man who might be dangerous if hard pressed; a man in whom the instinct of self-preservation was most strongly developed.

For some nights Nero was compelled, in spite of his earnest protest, to stay in the house. Niland

had intended this time to keep the dog a prisoner every night for a good long time; but after a few nights of the deafening noise he saw how impossible it was, and again allowed the dog full liberty.

The first night after this setting of the prisoner free Niland noticed that Nero again wanted to go down thru the ravine, now lying buried in the twilight. He called the dog to him, talked to him; earnestly tried to make him understand that the way of the transgressor is full of danger, to impress this deeply on the canine brain. For the moment the dog was all friendliness, much like the gentle little Dot. He who from earliest puppyhood had consorted with the wild beasts of the prairie, and had lived with them as one of them, now assumed the most innocent air in the world, as he sat listening to Niland, who supported the dog's head between his two hands. Nero, who led the life of the wild with its freedom and dangers, who without hesitating attacked and conquered even the dreaded rattlesnake, sat there with bright eyes and received the caresses of the only person whom he had learned to love.

When the instruction was ended Nero lay quietly down, as tho he really had understood every word of it and intended to profit by it.

The dog was lying there still when Niland went in to bed.

In the gray dawn Niland was awakened by the report of a gun down in the ravine. He hurried into his clothes and went outside. Soon he heard another shot, and on the heels of that the hoof-

beats of a galloping horse. He ran in and got his gun.

Then a third shot was heard out of the stillness, and the report was multiplied between the walls of the ravine. The sound of hoofs became more distinct. Then Niland saw something coming around the nearest bend in the road. He strained his eyes and saw that it was Nero; running slowly and painfully with a broken hind leg.

Then Niland understood what had happened.

A moment later a man on horseback appeared out of the gray light of the dawning day.

Nero lay down at the feet of Niland and began to lick the wound.

The horseman came trotting up to the place with the rifle in his hands. His face was pale with fury. The dog had killed the last of the large hogs.

Putting a strong restraint on himself, Niland offred to make good the damage done by his dog.

The furious man would not listen to the offer; he wanted the dog's life.

For a time they discussed the matter, more and more angrily. The man would not listen to reason; he was beside himself. Niland looked at him with a twisted smile on his lips.

"I am going to kill the dog even if I have to kill you first," screamed the man with the rifle, but without pointing the weapon at him.

Niland stood there as before with the smile on his lips, holding his own rifle pointing forward from his hip and with the trigger pulled back. He quietly

said: "Make sure that your first bullet hits the mark."

This was too much for the angry bully. Quick as a flash he brought his gun to the shoulder; but even while he was doing it Niland's riflle rang out, aimed from the hip, and the man fell to the ground with a broken arm.

That day Niland stayed at home. He spent the afternoon in seeing to it that his shooting-irons were in working order. After a long season of neglect the automatic pistol was furbished up and oiled. That night he lay with his clothes on. However, morning came, and there had so far been nothing doing.

It was a murky, cloudy day. Over all was the stillness of some dark foreboding.

The following night was pitch dark, as black as night can be. And with the darkness a strong wind came howling thru the ravine.

This night also Niland had purposed to stay awake. But he had not slept on the previous night, and now the heavy weariness at last overcame him. Several times he was awakened by the whistling of the wind. He was uneasy, knowing that he was in danger. He would not light a candle. It would shine out thru the window and might invite danger.

Nero also was uneasy. He growled at intervals, and in his troubled dreams he uttered many strange sounds.

In the middle of the night Niland became broad awake; Nero was barking with all his might.

At first Niland neither saw nor heard anything

startling. Then there was a faint light, which quickly became more and more lurid; until it dawned on Niland that his cabin was on fire. The miscreants had thought to revenge themselves by burning his cabin and him with it.

Another moment, and there was the report of a gun, and one of the window-panes was shattered.

Niland caught up his revolver, and the sack of gold-dust which he always kept under his pillow. Then he opened the window at the rear of the cabin and climbed out, and as noiselessly as his hurry allowed he pulled the dog out after him. Nero growled and wanted to bark, but was at once silenced by his master.

Now was heard one report after the other. The ruffians had not seen Niland, but kept on firing into the burning house in order to make sure that he could not escape.

Niland let them shoot. The important thing to him was to get away before the light grew strong enough to reveal his whereabouts.

He ran to a place on the dark prairie, where Topsy was tethered by an iron stake. There he had his saddle also and had soon strapped it on the back of the pony. By this time the fire was burning so fiercely that the light of it shone far out over the prairie.

Niland was in the saddle with the heavy dog stretched across his lap, when it was brought home to him that the enemy had caught sight of him, for a rifle ball went singing by, uncomfortably near him. Then came another, and yet another, and many

more in succession. They whistled out in sharp contrast to the whistling of the wind.

Niland bent forward as low as he could over the dog in order to make of himself as small a target as possible.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WANTED: WATER

TOPSY fairly flew across the prairie, and even in the inky darkness she was as sure-footed as ever, jumping over the high hillocks of heather. Niland was well on his way when a shot hit him. It was an accident rather than any skill on the part of the marksman. Niland felt a sharp pain in his leg. Then he felt that the stocking was wet, and that the blood was running down into his shoe.

After a time, when he knew that he was hid by the darkness, he dismounted for the purpose of bandaging his leg. He did it as well as he could in the dark, using his handkerchief for a bandage.

But he must go on, for he was far from having reached a place of safety. When day came those men would come out here and look about them. If they then saw that he had been wounded they would not soon give up the pursuit of him. Even if their thirst for revenge were not strong enough to keep them going, the gold which he had washed that summer, and which they surely must suppose that he had with him, certainly would be more than enough to induce them to keep up the chase.

With some difficulty Niland again climbed into the saddle and lifted Nero up there with him. He now rode more slowly, weakened as he was by the

loss of blood. He felt also a strange sort of dizziness.

When day began to dawn he had pulled the mare down to a walk. His foot was swollen and painful, and he suffered from a burning thirst.

He had intended to shape his course to strike a bend of the river to the south; but daylight revealed to him that he had missed the direction. So he now changed his course in order to reach the spring of water on the road to town, the only watering place within a circuit of many miles. There he would also be most likely to find somebody who could help him.

He shaped his course by the sun, now floating big and bright over the mountains.

It was a hilly country; with a grayish-white soil that reflected the rays of the sun, almost like snow. It was nearly naked of vegetation, with only some meager tufts of withered grass under the bare hillocks.

The heavens above him prophesied that it would be a day of blistering heat.

He rode on at a slow pace, sitting over on one side in the saddle; for he could not bear to put his sore foot in the stirrup. It did not bleed any more; it was swollen so badly that it was a tight fit for the leg of his trousers.

Nero's leg also was bad and swollen. When the day became warmer Niland was no longer able to bear the weight of him. Nero would have to manage as best he could on his three good legs. Niland wondered how long he himself would have strength

to keep in the saddle. Never before had he felt so helpless. There was a constant hammering in his head, which otherwise felt so strangely empty. No matter in which direction he turned his aching eyes, he saw only naked and sun-baked hills and a mercilessly clear sky with a scorching sun. The time dragged on; while the three—pony, dog, and man—dragged themselves painfully onward at a snail's pace.

The heat was cruel. With head hanging low the pony labored up and tottered down the hills. With head hanging low and with bent back, his broad-brimmed, gray hat pulled down low to shut out the glare, Niland reeled in his seat. And behind them limped poor Nero on three legs, and with his parched tongue hanging out nearly to the ground.

By noon Niland was "all in." They were then on the top of a hill which sloped gently down to all sides. The pony stopped of its own accord and sniffed the air in hopes of smelling water.

The sudden halt caused Niland to lose his balance. He tried to find the saddle-strap and hang on, but he could not do it. He fell, and in falling sprained his left wrist. Then for the first time in his life he lost consciousness.

When he came to, the afternoon was half gone. His leg was now so badly swollen that he had to take his knife and rip his trousers in order to loosen the bandage. The wrist also was swollen and sore. At his side stood Nero with tongue hanging as low as the drooping tail.

The pony was no longer in sight. No doubt it had gone away to look for water.

Niland had never been in such sore straits. He looked about him, and saw only the same bare hills, the endless desert, and the same cloudless sky.

Not far from where he lay was a sort of ledge with a faint suggestion of a cave. There was shadow, for the ledge faced the north. With a painful effort he crawled over to the place. He at once felt better. Now, if he only had some water; only some few drops of water. He knew that there was none to be had; he could only think of it and wish for it. His head was hot with fever. How much water he had so often wasted! He would never do it again. After this he would be very careful to avoid such wicked waste.

Nero lay down at his side. Niland patted his head and pitied him. The dog also suffered, and needed water. After a time Niland stretched himself on the ground, in such a position that he could see the hills and the heavens. The pain in his foot was becoming less severe.

Suddenly it struck him as surpassing strange that things happen so fast and so unexpectedly. Only yesterday he had food and water—an abundance of water. And today; well, he did not want food, he was not hungry; but water—water.

Many strange thoughts came to him as he was lying thus, with his eyes sometimes open and sometimes closed; things forgotten for many years; memories of his childhood. And the thoughts al-

ways led to a fine spring of water, a clear rivulet with green trees casting a cool shadow.

Great heavens, what a deal of water he had seen in his life. And he had wasted it recklessly, idiotically.

It struck him as strange that people did not drink more water; they must be very foolish.

The sun, blood-red and unnaturally big, sank to the edge of the horizon. He could now look it straight in the face without blinking. It was like a great sea of fire, with enormous waves of flaming fire rising and sinking.

Then the horizon began to clip the lower edge of it. Now only the upper half was left, now only the upper rim; and now it was all gone.

But the heavens where the sun had been were still bright with many colors; awe-inspiring contrast to the prairie, over which the shadows of night were falling fast.

The light was slow to fade out of the western sky. Some flecks of white and gold-rimmed clouds drifted leisurely in the gathering gloom; then the light of them also went out. Instead a big star shone out in the southwest. Dark night was come.

Nero rolled himself together right by his master's head. Niland took off his coat and used it as a blanket. He must sleep; he was deadly tired.

He did fall asleep, but only for a moment. He slept by fits and starts. Sometimes he woke up; and sometimes he was awakened by the howling of a coyote, or it may be by the melancholy hoot of an owl out of the great stillness.

A very gentle breeze fanned the face of the prairie.

Some time in the night a coyote came so near to Niland that he could see the glitter of its eyes over among the tufts of heather. Instinctively he drew his revolver, and without getting up he pointed it straight between the two eyes of the beast. But he did not shoot. A new thought presented itself to him. Why in the name of all that's inflammable should he destroy this life to no purpose? Did not this coyote have as good a right as he to live? Possibly he himself was near the end. The Lord only knew—if help did not come soon it——was this to be the finish? Was he like so many another desert rat to die as lonely as he had lived? What would become of his dead body? His thoughts continued to follow this dreary road. Who would find his sunbaked bones? He wondered whether Nero slept, or whether it was the pain in the foot which made the dog so indifferent to everything.

In the cool night his thirst did not torture him as much as had been the case during the hot day.

For hours he lay looking up at the stars. How numberless they were, and how near they seemed to be! Then he closed his eyes and slept from sheer exhaustion.

When he next opened his eyes the land was bathed in sunshine. From where he lay he could not see the sun; but the slant of the shadows told him that it must have been up a couple of hours.

He looked about for the dog; but it was gone.

Had even Nero deserted him? Was he now ab-

solutely alone with his helplessness in these illimitable wilds? He could hardly believe it; Nero was not that kind of a dog. He put the two fingers into his mouth and whistled. The whistle was not as shrill as he had been able to make it when well; but still it went pretty far out into the desert.

No sooner had the sound died out than he heard another sound which made his blood run cold; a sound which all knew and feared, the clatter of a rattlesnake. And at the same time he felt something cold and clammy move over his wounded foot and over his bare flesh where his trousers had been ripped open. He did not move; hardly dared to draw his breath. When the snake no longer moved, Niland slightly raised his head to look at the reptile. It was a monster; about four feet long and two or three inches in diameter. He saw the long, flattened head, the black and glittering eyes. And he saw the tail with these rings—looking something like celluloid—which cause the rattle. There were nine rings, and a button at the end—one ring, it is claimed, for each year of the snake's life

But as he saw this he saw also something else; something that set his heart going again. Nero came running as fast as he could on his three feet. He came straight to his master and sniffed at his face. Niland dared not stir, nor say anything.

Nero had not noticed the snake till it announced its presence by rattling as a protest against being disturbed.

During the dog's puppyhood Niland had tried to teach him never to have any dealings with a rat-

tler. But the dog had a too stubborn nature; in this matter as in others he had gone his own way. And now for the first time Niland was thankful for the dog's obstinacy.

Another dog would have begun to bark and so goad the snake into striking. Nero knew better; he had had experience with snakes. He approached it with a low growl, with the hair of his neck standing on end and with a snarl which bared his strong fangs.

The snake raised its head, hissed and struck; but the dog had bounded to one side.

Niland watched the scene with deep anxiety. He saw how the snake unclamped its jaws all the way back to the neck. He saw the incredibly rapid darting back and forth of the forked tongue in that dreadful mouth; and the two coal-black eyes glittering like polished pearls. Again and again the snake struck at Nero, but did not reach him.

Of course Nero was not as quick as when he had four good legs. He watched and waited.

Whenever the snake drew the head back after an abortive strike the dog always was close by. Niland, looking on, was afraid that the snake in its fury might strike at the nearest object in which it could bury its fangs. He wanted to make an end of it; so when the snake drew its hissing head back after the next fruitless strike, Niland whispered: "At him, Nero."

The dog obeyed. Quick as a flash he tried, as he had often done before, to lay hold on the snake's

neck. But the snake was equally quick. It struck again, and wounded Nero in the jaw.

This was its last strike; for in the next moment Nero caught it just back of the head, and with his sharp teeth severed the head from the body.

Niland examined the dog's wound. It showed merely as a tiny red spot on the gums; but Niland knew how dangerous it was.

So he tried the only remedy at hand. He turned back the upper lip of the dog, and then bent down and tried to suck the poison out of the wound. But when he had done this as well as he could, the jaw of the dog was already somewhat swollen.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

THERE was but one chance for Niland, and that was to send the dog for help. But how to do it? How was he to make the dog understand?

The watering-place on the road to town was the one place at which he might hope to find help People coming or going usually stopped at that point to rest themselves and their horses.

The place could not be far away. If persuaded to go in that direction, the dog would, no doubt, soon smell water and make haste to reach it.

Niland called the dog; and, pointing in what he took to be the right direction, he said: "Nero, go far away over there."

Nero could see nothing over there which his master might want. Niland put out his hand: "Go, Nero; go."

Nero went some steps, and then stopped and looked about him.

"Go on, far away, my good Nero." And Niland again pointed out over the prairie. The dog went some steps farther, and again stopped to look in all directions.

Niland continued to wave his hand and encourage the dog to go on.

So the dog went on and stopped, and went on

again, until he reached the top of the next hill. There he stood still as not knowing what to do. He turned away as if to go on whenever Niland gave the signal; but then thought better of it, and stood looking back at his master, whom he seemed unable to persuade himself to leave.

Finally, after much waving of the hand and shouting, which nearly exhausted Niland's last ounce of strength, he saw the dog limp away and disappear among the hillocks of the heather.

Niland remained lying there without the strength to move. The heat was by this time very trying. He examined his leg. The flesh near the wound was now a dark red. Then his thoughts followed the dog.

Would he meet anyone before being overcome by the poison? In spite of the attempt to draw it out there would be some poison left in the wound. It was a rare thing for a dog to survive such a bite; tho a man might if he were strong and healthy, and especially if he had been able at once to take some antidote.

He felt a chill at the thought of that snake. If it had struck at him his chance for life would hardly be worth trading on.

Now, if the dog should fall in with some men, would they understand what he wanted of them? And if not, what then? If the dog should die on the way, Niland's hour would soon come.

Should any people come this way, they would need some beacon to tell them where he was. By a severe tax on his remaining strength he managed

to crawl out into the heather, gather some of it into a pile and set it on fire.

A thin column of smoke ascended straight up into the still air.

After a time a dog was seen to come limping on three feet, followed by a man on horseback, who was towing Topsy behind him. They reached Niland; and the man proved to be his friend the old trapper. The dog had set out straight for the water, as all animals would, and had found the trapper resting at the watering-place on his way back to his lonely home after one of his weeks of dissipation in town.

The old man had seen Topsy with her saddle on, and had suspected that something was wrong. He was sure of it when Nero also came limping to the place.

The gums of Nero were so swollen that his teeth were exposed. He now lay down near his master. His breathing was difficult, and it was plainly to be seen that he was dying. After a half hour Nero died with his head resting in Niland's lap.

The trapper dug a grave on the slope of the sun-baked hill, and Nero was buried without further ceremony. But no more honest tears have ever been wept at any grave than those shed by Niland at the grave of his faithful dog.

Nero had twice that day saved his master's life, and had given his own in doing it.

He had always been different from the usual run of dogs. He had chosen his own manner of life, and it had been a life of many adventures. He had

devoted his time to the service of his master when not engaged in escapades or in fights with the animals that he loved or hated.

And now he was dead; and the deep tones of his big voice would never again answer the call of the coyotes at the going down of the sun.

Never again would the lean and strong body chase a rabbit over the plain. Never would the bright and intelligent eyes look again at Niland, as they so often had done during the lonely watches. And now he was lost to the one man whom he had known and loved best.

He was buried on the prairie which had been his home; in the soil and under the heavens which were the only soil and heavens he had known. The coyotes will continue to sing and howl above his grave, but he will not hear them.

When spring comes again it may be that his mate, whom he set free in order that she might bring forth her young outside of prison, will sing her love-songs to him in the moonlit nights; she may seek for him and call to him from the hills down toward the river.

But poor Nero will not be there, and will not answer.

So she will go her way to find another mate, and Nero will for all time be forgotten.

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